

Martin Myant

# POLAND: A CRISIS FOR SOCIALISM



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Jacket photograph, taken from the headquarters of Solidarity in Warsaw, shows Warsaw residents and Polish militiamen in confrontation (© Gamma)

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# **POLAND: A CRISIS FOR SOCIALISM**

by

**MARTIN MYANT**

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# Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	ix
Chronology	xv
1. Polish History and Polish Nationalism	1
Poland reborn	
War and resistance	
2. From Polish Road to Stalinist Model	21
The Polish road to socialism	
The Stalinist regime in Poland	
Economic illusions shattered	
The collapse of the monolith	
3. Gomulka in Power	48
The reversal of democratization	
The failure of economic reforms	
The same economic mistakes again	
The end of inequality?	
Workers' power in the factories	
4. The Gierek Period	79
Gomulka's exit	
No democratization under Gierek	
Gierek's new economic strategy	
1976 and after	
The nature and cause of Gierek's crisis	
5. The Strikes and the Deepening Crisis	111
The workers speak	
The economy plunges	
Solidarity fights for full recognition	
6. The Party – Renewal or Disintegration?	140
Kania's line runs into trouble	
The media and nationalism	
Slow renewal in the economy	
The party on the point of collapse?	
Soviet pressure constricts renewal	
The extraordinary congress	

7. Solidarity – Trade Union or Political Opposition?	176
Splits and divisions in the union	
A programme for Solidarity	
Self-management – the new panacea	
Another inconclusive congress	
8. The Road to Martial Law	212
The October Central Committee meeting	
A new basis for agreement?	
Jaruzelski chooses confrontation	
‘Radicals’ take the initiative	
The army takes power	
Index	251

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# Introduction

On 13 December 1981 martial law was declared in Poland. For the first time in Eastern Europe since the Second World War the power of a ruling party was superseded by the armed forces; all political and trade union activities were suspended and a massive clampdown was imposed over the whole country. There have been periodic relaxations of some of the harshest measures – such as the ban on the use of private cars, the night-time curfew and the cutting of all private telephones – but the authorities have made it clear that they will not hesitate to use the full powers again whenever there is any significant public demonstration of opposition.

The strikes of August 1980 and the birth of the independent trade union, Solidarity, had led to a great burst of hope and enthusiasm and a renewed confidence among the working people that Poland's problems could be overcome. In practice, however, there followed fifteen months of recurrent industrial conflict – on a scale and of a duration almost unknown anywhere in the world – and a dramatic collapse in industry leading, as prominent party figures accepted, to the deepest economic crisis experienced anywhere in post-war Europe.

This book is intended to provide a basis for understanding how that crisis, and the political one that accompanied it, arose and why this process culminated in the imposition of military rule. The book was started after a visit to Poland in the early summer of 1981, when there seemed to be no likelihood of an early end to the country's crisis. Large sections of the population had lost all faith in the authorities and were simply not prepared to believe official reports about the state of the economy: they did not accept that the sacrifices demanded of them would lead to a solution. The regime for its part was fully aware of the economic difficulties, but was unwilling to contemplate the political changes – leading towards democratisation of the power structure – that might have enabled it to regain some public confidence. To the party leaders it was largely an economic crisis whereas to others, including many party members, it was primarily a political or even a 'moral' crisis. Its origins were in the failure of a model of socialism which had been applied throughout Eastern Europe since the late 1940s.

The first four chapters trace the development of this crisis against the background of recent Polish history. The central problem, it is argued, relates to the question of democracy. It is not evidence of a failure of socialism in general, but of a particular model of socialism in which power is monopolised within one ruling party. No legal opposition is allowed and neither are there independent mass organisations that can criticise or challenge those in power. All important positions are ultimately decided by a small group of party leaders who can thereby make themselves impervious to criticism or discontent within society.

This system, it must be said, has considerable achievements to its credit. Under Communist leadership the Poles rebuilt their country out of the devastation and ruins of war and established new industries in previously backward areas. The extremes of poverty, associated especially with unemployment, were eliminated and the society they created was considerably richer and more egalitarian than the pre-war Polish republic.

Looking back from 1981, however, with the regime's reputation in ruins after its disastrous mistakes in economic policy, in the mid 1970s, it was the failures and disappointments over all the post-war years that were most easily remembered. People were reminded of earlier occasions when ambitious promises of an economic miracle had ended in mediocre performance and cuts in workers' living standards. Above all, they remembered again the bloody confrontations when the regime reacted to signs of discontent by firing on and inevitably in some cases killing workers in 1956, 1970 and 1976. Had there been some institutional mechanism for people to make their opinions felt, then such tragedies need never have occurred.

This model of socialism was, of course, imposed with the help of the USSR. However, while there is no denying that the Polish Communists took power without the support of the majority of the people, that does not mean that the broad ideas of socialism were not very popular or that the party itself could not have greatly expanded its support. It may be that, in view of Poland's strong national and religious traditions, the potential for enthusiastic backing for a Communist Party was less than in some other Eastern European countries, and that that is a partial explanation for the exceptional instability of the Polish regime over the last three decades. Nevertheless, it cannot possibly explain the current crisis. In 1956 and again in the early 1970s the party leadership clearly did enjoy a great deal of popularity. The evidence is that when it promised socialism,

national dignity and greater democracy – in the sense of at least giving a say in decisions to ordinary people – then there were no serious complaints.

Neither need the long history of struggle against tsarism and the hostility generated by the events of 1939, when the Red Army shared in the destruction of the pre-war Polish state, have permanently damaged the reputation of the Soviet Union. After the Second World War it was seen by many as a vital ally ensuring the nation's existence while NATO policy was for the rearmament of a powerful West Germany which refused to recognise Poland's post-war frontiers. Today the fact that six million Polish citizens were killed by the Nazis often seems to cause less concern than the deaths under unclear circumstances of some 4,000 Polish army officers at Katyn. That Katyn should be so widely blamed on the Soviet Union, and that it should still be regarded as a major political issue, is a dramatic illustration of the failure of the Soviet and Polish governments' efforts to create genuine friendship between the peoples of the two countries.

If there was to have been a democratisation process, leading to a model of socialism in which the people had the final control over those in power, then 1956 probably presented the best opportunity. Ultimately, to ensure that the authorities remain under the control of society, the ideal mechanism includes frequent and regular contested elections. The experience of 1956 suggests that without that it is remarkably easy for those in power to reestablish the same autocratic power structure. It should, however, be possible to avoid the worst of the regime's mistakes if mass organisations, representative bodies and the media are given independence from direct control by those in power. That would create a channel both for constructive criticism over major policy issues and for the leadership to be kept aware of a build-up of discontent.

It has of course been recognised, since the armed intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, that the Soviet leadership is very reluctant to allow such changes in Eastern Europe. Its post-war objective has been to ensure the absolute loyalty of the government in Poland as that country is crucial to the defence of the Soviet Union's Western frontier and to the maintenance of Soviet forces in East Germany. This objective need not conflict with democracy if the Polish people can be convinced that a close alliance with the USSR is vital for their own security. The Soviet leadership, however, seems unprepared to risk giving the Poles a free choice.

The likelihood of a Soviet military intervention in 1980 and 1981

may have been exaggerated in the West, but it was widely seen as a real enough possibility inside Poland. Moreover, the depth of the economic crisis made Poland heavily dependent on its allies in Eastern Europe who alone were prepared to give assistance. This certainly created a major constraint, adding to the apparent intractability of the crisis. If the regime had made major concessions – for example by abolishing press censorship as had been done in Czechoslovakia in March 1968 – then it might have eased the road to winning the vital cooperation of Solidarity in solving economic problems, but that political concession might have been judged intolerably dangerous by the Soviet leaders.

If there was a solution then it depended on the party retaining a dominant position in the power structure, while also allowing the mass of the population a real say in important decisions. A total and immediate transformation of the power structure, involving early contested elections, was not possible. The need was for a gradual process of change that could stretch the limits acceptable to the Soviet leadership. It had to be shown that an extension of democracy did not mean chaos or counter revolution; then perhaps those limits could gradually have been extended further throughout Eastern Europe.

The practical problems of implementing such a strategy were immense and depended on a conscious effort on the part of both the party and Solidarity. My impression in Radom in May 1981 was that – despite a number of unprecedented reforms that were implemented – there was little real pressure from within the party for the policies that could make such a solution possible. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to write off the ruling parties of Eastern Europe as unreformable particularly when, as Chapter 6 makes clear, so much did change within the Polish party. A common attitude among party members in Radom was one of open-minded disillusion. They accepted the need to search for new ideas and many openly doubted whether Polish society could be described as socialist at all. It may be that, had an inspiring lead been given from higher up, they could have taken initiatives in democratising society. The absence of such a lead can, of course be blamed partly on the repeated condemnations of democratisation in the past and on the persistent Soviet pressure. Nevertheless, the impression remains that the movement inside the party went off on the wrong track.

A serious analysis of the Polish crisis cannot be a simple defence of Solidarity either. Within the new unions there were many different positions, but deep and widespread hostility towards the whole party,

plus a common failure to appreciate both the depth of the economic crisis and the realities of the international situation made a solution more difficult. These attitudes, however, did not stem from manipulation by foreign or imperialist agents. My own discussions with ordinary members of Solidarity in Radom left no doubt that it was no more militant or belligerent than large numbers of its members who were totally disillusioned with the existing authorities.

This on its own did not make agreement between Solidarity and the government impossible. Many of the leading figures in Solidarity were fully aware of the difficulties and constraints confronting them. The judgement of this book is that the greatest obstacles were in the party's inability to institute a major and inspiring programme of democratisation and reform which could give the mass of the population the feeling that they had a real say in major government decisions.

It was never going to be easy to solve Poland's problems, but since 13 December it has looked much harder. For the foreseeable future the road to democratisation has been closed and there is no sign of an early end to the economic difficulties.

At the Central Committee meeting of 22-23 April 1982, Jaruzelski and the 22 other speakers concentrated almost exclusively on directly economic problems and policies. Evidently, as political reforms had come to a standstill, they saw this as the single arena in which they could hope to restore some public credibility. The prospect, however, was of a long and hard road to recovery. The first stage was to stop the continuing decline in industry, and Jaruzelski acknowledged that that was not going to be easy. If that were achieved quickly, and if all else were to go well, then he could foresee a full stabilisation of the economy some time around 1990.

This dismal perspective can hardly be expected to undermine Solidarity's support. There may well even be violent outbursts of discontent, especially from young people, and perhaps some major strikes in industry but, contrary to the belief of a number of prominent Solidarity figures, the authorities need not feel compelled to allow the re-establishment of genuinely independent trade unions. Solidarity has shown amazing resourcefulness, even starting radio broadcasts from central Warsaw, but it is still far from being a threat to a regime that has finally decided to counter signs of opposition with violent repression and with sanctions that punish the whole population.

For the longer term, however, the Polish events can give grounds for optimism. The Polish government committed enormous blunders

during three decades. Not surprisingly, the term 'socialism' was devalued in the eyes of much of the Polish population. Nevertheless, when Solidarity produced its programmatic principles it proved that it was definitely not becoming an anti-socialist organisation. On the contrary, it was advocating a great extension of democracy, with positions of authority, from workplaces to the highest posts in the government, all subject to election.

There are grounds for criticising many aspects of Solidarity's ideas, but such a democratisation of society is quite incompatible with capitalism. It depends on, and should be seen as one of the great potential benefits of, the social ownership of the means of production.

The events of 1980-1981 indicated yet again that the future for Eastern Europe ultimately lies not in a restoration of capitalism but in a democratisation of the existing socialist societies.

# Chronology of events

- 1 July 1980 Increase in meat prices. Protest strikes in Ursus and elsewhere.
- 11-20 July General strike in Lublin.
- 14 August Strike begins in the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk.
- 17 August MKS (Inter-factory Strike Committee) formed in the Lenin shipyard.
- 18 August Strikes spread to Szczecin.
- 24 August Gierek addresses the nation. New government, headed by Piskowski.
- 26 August Deputy Prime Minister Jagielski begins serious negotiations in Gdansk.
- 30, 31 August, 3 September Szczecin, Gdansk and Jastrzebie agreements allow formation of independent trade unions.
- 5 September Kania replaces Gierek as party first secretary and outlines policy of 'socialist renewal' to the Central Committee.
- 17 September Meeting in Gdansk agrees to create an independent union called Solidarity.
- 3 October One-hour general strike demanding implementation of pay increases that have been granted.
- 24 October Solidarity's registration accepted, but court inserts reference to the party's leading role.
- 10 November Supreme court accepts Solidarity's terms for registration.
- 20 November Two union members arrested. Strikes begin in Warsaw and help ensure their release a week later.
- 5 December Summit meeting of Warsaw Pact leaders in Moscow amid attacks on Solidarity in the Soviet press and reports in the West of imminent invasion.
- 10, 24 January 1981 Solidarity calls for no work on these Saturdays as part of the campaign for the 40-hour week.

- 2 February Compromise agreement on reduction in working week, but strikes continue on local issues in many parts of the country.
- 10 February Supreme court rejects Rural Solidarity's registration as a union.
- 11 February General Jaruzelski replaces Pinkowski as Prime Minister and calls for 90 days without strikes.
- 18 February Lodz student strike ends with agreement to allow Independent Union of Students.
- 4 March CPSU congress in Moscow. Kania and Jaruzelski hold talks with the Soviet leadership.
- 19 March Police brutality in Bydgoszcz.
- 22 March Political Bureau statement supporting police behaviour in Bydgoszcz.
- Four-hour general strike.
- 27 March Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) Central Committee. Heated debate during which Olszowski and Grabski offer to resign.
- 29 March Agreement averts threatened indefinite general strike.
- 30 March
- 1 April Meat rationing introduced.
- 3 April Solidarity weekly begins publication
- 15 April Meeting organised by 'horizontal structures' in Torun.
- 27 April 15 governments agree in Paris to accept delay in repayments of Polish debt.
- 12 May Rural Solidarity registered as a trade union.
- 9-11 June Central Committee meets to discuss highly critical letter from the CPSU. Attempt to unseat Kania fails.
- 14-20 July PUWP Ninth congress. Kania reelected by secret ballot.
- 25 July 'Hunger marches' begin in some towns.
- 24 August Solidarity leadership calls for two months without strikes or demonstrations and for voluntary extra Saturday working.
- 1 September Solidarity's only television broadcast under full union control. Price of bread increased.
- 5-10 September First half of Solidarity congress.
- 16 September PUWP Political Bureau strongly condemns Solidarity congress resolutions.

- 25 September Parliament accepts compromise formulations in law on self management.
- 26 September-  
7 October Second half of Solidarity congress. Walesa reelected and programme resolution calls for continuation of the policy of agreement and compromise.
- 16-18 October Central Committee meeting. Jaruzelski replaces Kania amid bitter attacks on Solidarity.
- 28 October Strikes in many parts of Poland involving 250,000 workers. Solidarity calls one-hour general strike.
- 30 October Faced with stiff opposition Jaruzelski drops attempt to push through parliament draft laws on emergency powers and on banning strikes.
- 4 November Meeting of Jaruzelski, Glemp and Walesa to lay basis for national agreement. Solidarity National Commission calls for a suspension of strikes.
- 6 November Solidarity Presidium calls for a total end to all strikes that damage the economy.
- 9 November Polish government applies to join the IMF.
- 17 November Solidarity Presidium presents conditions for a national agreement.
- 28 November Central Committee passes a resolution calling on all PUWP MPs to support draft law on emergency powers.
- 2 December Police use force to end strike by fire cadets. Solidarity cannot decide on a response.
- 3 December Solidarity meeting in Radom is bugged. Extracts of 'extremist' speeches are broadcast shortly afterwards.
- 7 December Glemp speaks out strongly against proposed law to limit the right to strike.
- 11 December Solidarity National Commission meets in Gdansk to decide on response to threat of use of force by the authorities.
- 12 December Council of State decides to impose martial law. Solidarity meeting ends with calls for a day of protest against violence and for a referendum on the government's right to rule.
- 13 December Martial law declared.

# 1 Polish History and Polish Nationalism

Poland is a country with a strong national heritage – a continuing source of pride and resilience in difficult times. However not all Poland's past is to its credit. In particular the persecution of minorities, especially Jews was widespread. Such attitudes survive today, albeit to a much lesser degree, as do prejudices against neighbouring countries. Nationalism need in no way conflict with support for socialist ideas; however it has gained special political significance in the present situation in Poland, largely because the particular model of socialism that developed there was closely associated with the expansion of Soviet influence and the imposition of the Soviet Union's will throughout Eastern Europe. Under these special circumstances, and given Poland's special nationalist sensibilities, strong national traditions have been one of the major factors behind the relative instability of the Communist regime in Poland, even when compared with other Eastern European countries.

All Poles know that their country once had a major influence on European politics. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was large and affluent, controlling territories well to the East including the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the present-day Baltic republics. At one time a Polish army occupied the Kremlin, and in 1683 Polish cavalry played the decisive role in defeating the Turks outside Vienna. By 1795, however, this role as a great power had gone. Poland was partitioned between the Prussian, Austrian and Russian empires with the majority of Poles living under tsarist domination.

The following years saw repeated and determined uprisings. If France gained a reputation as the home of revolutions, Poland earned for itself a reputation as the home of the classical national uprising. The strongest in military terms was in 1831 when probably about 40,000 took part. The tsarist regime, which had good historical reasons for fears and suspicions towards Poland, responded with brutal repression. The country was run as an occupied territory with the aim of eliminating Polish nationalism through a policy of Russification.

This was successful in preventing any major insurrections in the

latter part of the century, but a new basis was created for active opposition of a different kind. Industry was developing faster than in the Russian empire generally and the new working class left no doubt of its militancy and of its deep hostility to the government, especially during 1905 when Polish workers joined in the revolutionary events that were spreading across Russia. Working-class parties grew rapidly to become major political forces and control was only restored by brutal means that cost scores of lives.

This working-class militancy gave new life to Polish nationalism. In practice it also led to disagreements and differences between the various political movements. The Polish Socialist Party, founded in 1892, had seen independence as its first aim. The experience of the revolutionary events and the radical ideas of the mass of new recruits led to acceptance of the possibility of a joint struggle with the workers of the whole Russian empire. The immediate aim was therefore not full independence, but only a separate constituent assembly in Warsaw.

There were others, associated with Rosa Luxemburg in the Social Democratic Party, who persisted in seeing the national question as a diversion. They believed that it would be solved spontaneously following an international socialist revolution. Paradoxically this led them to a position on Polish independence similar to that of the most reactionary Poles who saw tsarist Russia as a defence against social revolution.

There was, however, another view within the Socialist Party and the differences soon culminated in a complete organisational split. The old leadership around Pilsudski did not aim to involve itself in workers' struggles. Instead, it believed that the revolutionary disorders were creating the opportunity for a new national insurrection. It therefore created armed units which carried out numerous assassinations of government officials. In 1908 Pilsudski, based in the Austrian-controlled part of Poland, began seriously preparing an embryonic army. His hope was to win Austrian support for Polish independence in the event of a general European war. His political programme was effectively purged of references to social reform or socialism, but his activities still won him a great deal of popularity later. In the period when the workers' movement was experiencing great difficulties, he could claim to be doing something positive for the Polish cause.

His strategy did seem credible for a time during the First World War. Poland was almost entirely German occupied. In an effort to secure volunteers for their war effort, the Central Powers granted Poland a certain degree of autonomy. Pilsudski, however, became

sceptical of the possibilities of winning full independence and anyway became convinced that Austria and Germany would be defeated. He therefore demanded greater independence for his volunteers who were fighting with the Central Powers. The German authorities rejected his demands and he was arrested and interned in June 1917. This helped to enhance his reputation enormously when both Germany and Austria collapsed at the end of 1918. This, together with the Russian revolutions of 1917, and the Bolsheviks' clear statement of Poland's right to independence, opened the way for the re-establishment of a Polish state.

### *Poland reborn*

In November 1918 Pilsudski returned to Poland. He already enjoyed tremendous prestige and became head of state as well as commander of the army. He saw himself as the unifier of the national movement, bringing together the different political parties in a coalition government that could restore order out of the chaos left by the war.

The most important alternative to Pilsudski's conception of national independence was the idea of an immediate socialist revolution, supported by the left wing of the Polish Socialist Party and also by the Social Democrats. It is impossible to know how much support they could have won, but their influence was greatly restricted by their own inability to understand the significance of the national question. They had opposed Polish independence before and they were disoriented by the wave of popular enthusiasm for the new state.

Workers' and peasants' councils, often consciously modelled on the soviets in Russia, were formed in many areas in November 1918. Estimates of their number vary enormously and their aims were rarely clearly defined, but in some areas they were hoping to become direct organs of revolutionary power. In the Dabrowa mining region they took guns from the demoralised Austrian army of occupation and formed a detachment of about 2,000 Red Guards. They disowned the Warsaw government, calling on the army to ignore its instructions, and expressed solidarity with Soviet Russia, while taking control of food distribution and proclaiming an eight-hour day and an immediate doubling of wages.<sup>1\*</sup> They did not, however, broach the crucial issue of statehood and they thereby left it ambiguous whether Poland was to be independent or not. Shortly afterwards, the Communist Workers'

\* See notes at the end of each chapter.

Party of Poland (renamed the Communist Party of Poland in 1925) was formed by a merger of some Socialists with the Social Democrats. In its initial declaration it proclaimed that 'the Polish proletariat rejects every political solution that is to be connected with the evolution of a capitalistic world, solutions like autonomy, independence and self-determination'.<sup>2</sup>

Instead it proclaimed that, 'for the international camp of social revolution there is no problem of national frontiers'. This was a direct continuation of Rosa Luxemburg's view, strongly criticised by Lenin, and could never have been a basis for uniting the whole Polish working class let alone the majority of the Polish people. It was simply impossible to wish away the national question.

It is therefore hardly surprising that many groups of workers remained indifferent to similar appeals issued by the Dabrowa workers' council. It proved fairly easy for the government to disarm the Red Guards and firmly establish its authority in December 1918.

Events in the rest of Poland left little doubt that there was a strong desire for social change and significant support for a revolutionary programme. Government figures on the composition of the ten main councils of workers' delegates in April 1919 showed 1,036 Socialists, 899 Communists and several hundred others largely from Jewish organisations who, along with the left wing of the Socialist Party, often allied with the Communists.

The Polish government, however, was able to restrict the appeal of the movement by itself implementing a number of social reforms, including the eight-hour day, and by holding parliamentary elections in January 1919. The Communists boycotted the elections on the basis of the naive hope that capitalism, and the new Polish state, were on the point of collapse. They thought a Soviet-type revolution was imminent. In fact, there seemed to be little chance of it at the time, but the issue was brought dramatically to the fore in the late summer of 1920 when the Red Army seemed to be on the point of capturing Warsaw.

Conflict between the new Poland and Soviet Russia was effectively inevitable as Pilsudski boldly insisted on trying to restore some of his country's former power. In his view 'Poland will be a great power or she will not exist'.<sup>3</sup> This totally unrealistic notion led him to reject the Curzon line which was proposed in December 1919 by the Western powers as Poland's frontier with Soviet Russia. Its significance was that, to the east of that line, Poles were a clear minority of the population. They lived mostly in the towns and many of them were

substantial landowners. The peasants were Lithuanian, Byelorussian or Ukrainian.

There had been armed conflicts in this area during 1919 and Polish forces were occupying land to the east of the proposed frontier. The Soviet government, in an effort to reach a firm peace agreement, offered to make substantial territorial concessions handing over land 'which, by the composition of its population, should not belong to Poland'. The Polish reply was a carefully-prepared surprise attack launched at the end of April 1920. Books were written on the campaign by Pilsudski himself and by Sikorski, the Polish army commander. They make it clear that they saw themselves fighting a 'national' war aiming to regain territory that had once belonged to Poland.

At the beginning of May 1920 Polish forces captured Kiev, but then the tide turned. Until then the Red Army had been fighting a civil war against the Whites whose broad objective was the restoration of the old regime. In May, however, the Soviet forces effectively eliminated all other serious enemies and could deal with the Polish attack.

In mid July the Second Congress of the Comintern opened in an atmosphere of general optimism. There seemed to be a real chance that workers in other countries would respond to an earlier Comintern appeal for a boycott of military supplies or food to Poland. This was, of course, to be proved correct when, in August 1920, London dockers refused to load munitions bound for Poland.

It also seemed to Lenin that there really was a revolutionary atmosphere inside Poland. He could convince himself and a majority of the other Bolshevik leaders that the Polish workers and peasants would see Soviet Russia not as an oppressor, but as a liberator 'from the chains of Allied capital' and from 'Polish landlords and capitalists' who had dragged them into an unnecessary war. He therefore hoped that further advance by the Red Army could provoke revolution in Poland which might then be followed by Germany. While still insisting that 'Soviet Russia does not harbour any plans of conquest against the Polish people',<sup>4</sup> the Soviet leadership were persuaded that the Red Army should press on westwards.

In August 1920, soon after the capture of Bialystok, a Provisional Revolutionary Committee for Poland was established. It issued a great deal of propaganda material which showed up some of the differences between the Polish and Russian Communists. One example was the Poles' insistence that large estates would be nationalised but not divided up. It had, of course, been the Bolsheviks'

willingness to give immediate use of land to the peasants that had made it possible for them to take and hold power.

The committee saw itself handing over power to 'The Communist Workers' Party of Poland' once Warsaw had been occupied.<sup>5</sup> Only then would it allow power to go to a council of workers' and peasants' delegates. This could suggest that, despite Lenin's confident attitude, it was recognised at least by the Polish Communists that they still lacked the basis for a genuinely autonomous revolution. Information on these crucial events is still too scanty for a definite judgement. In fact, the whole operation failed and the Red Army was soon thrown back. A peace treaty was eventually signed conceding large areas to Poland.

The Polish army commanders liked to explain this in terms of their military prowess. Lenin, however, put the emphasis elsewhere. As he said a year later: 'in the Red Army the Poles saw enemies, not brothers and liberators ... The revolution in Poland on which we counted did not take place.'<sup>6</sup> It was an important lesson for the Soviet leadership and also for the Polish Communists. For a long time they had to bear the stigma of having supported what was seen as a foreign invasion. They came to accept that revolution was not on the immediate agenda and they also came to accept an independent Polish state. They were for some time reluctant even to discuss the national question, but they later advocated a policy of attaching the predominantly Ukrainian and Byelorussian areas onto the respective Soviet republics.

For Pilsudski and other Polish leaders, however, the episode created a completely false sense of their military power. The new state had emerged because of the *temporary* collapse of Germany and Russia. Pilsudski and his colleagues failed to appreciate the significance of this and believed that Poland could rely on its own strength. Even in the middle and late 1930s they continued to overestimate their military might. Still regarding the Soviet Union as the principal enemy, they showed no interest at all in a system of collective security against possible German aggression. Foreign Minister Beck condemned the Franco-Soviet and Czechoslovak-Soviet treaties as turning these countries into tools 'in the hands of the Comintern'.<sup>7</sup> Although refusing to join Hitler's Anti-Comintern pact, Poland, having made it clear that it would not allow Soviet forces to cross its territory to help Czechoslovakia had the Czechs requested such help, even went so far as to share in the destruction of Czechoslovakia by taking the Cieszyn (Tesin) area, following the infamous Munich agreement of 1938.

Poland's leaders were living in a dream world in which it would be possible to link up with Hungary to create a Central European power able to stand up to both Germany and the Soviet Union.

This naïve and reactionary approach to foreign policy was matched by a rightward drift in domestic policies. At first Polish political life proved to be extremely unstable. One government followed another as none could gain a secure parliamentary majority. Part of the trouble was the fragmentation into an enormous number of political parties – 32 were represented in parliament in 1925 – partly reflecting the diverse traditions of the parts of Poland that had been incorporated into three different empires. Instability was accentuated by repeated economic crises which no government at the time could control. The most serious was during the world depression when about a quarter of Polish workers were unemployed and many peasants were ruined.

Even before that, however, there had been a major step towards an authoritarian regime when, in May 1926, the attempt to form a new centre-right coalition met with strong opposition from the Socialists. Pilsudski, who had frequently come into conflict with parliament, used his influence over the armed forces to lead some major army units into Warsaw with the aim of seizing power. He won fairly easily after 400 people had died in three days of fighting with troops loyal to the government, but that victory was only made possible by the failure of the Socialist and Communist Parties to oppose him either by strike action or in parliament. The Polish Communists initially believed that Pilsudski's action was directed against the capitalists and landlords and they called on the workers and peasants to support him and to try to push him further to the left.<sup>8</sup> Soon, however, it became clear that Pilsudski did not intend any radical changes at all. Communists, who were by that time represented in parliament, therefore switched to voting against him a couple of months after the coup. They began to argue that his regime had a great deal in common with fascism. There certainly were some similarities, but they should not be exaggerated. Pilsudski's regime and method of governing was substantially different from Mussolini's in Italy or Hitler's in Germany. Above all, it did not eliminate all opposition.

The new government started out with only the vaguest of programmes. It described itself as the *Sanacja* (moral rehabilitation) and promised to rid the country of corruption and of debilitating foreign influences that had allegedly been left behind by the three empires. The dominant figures within this were Pilsudski's close associates from pre-independence days and the role of the army

became increasingly strong. In 1929 the first of the so called 'colonels' cabinets' was formed in which 6 of its 14 members were army officers.

Parliament was not dissolved but its role definitely declined. Large-scale intimidation and the imprisonment of political opponents enabled Pilsudski's supporters to secure a parliamentary majority. At one time several thousand prisoners were held in one camp alone, while the Communist Party in 1930 had half of its 12,000 members in prison.<sup>9</sup> Under these circumstances it was hardly surprising that opposition parties could not win a majority in elections. Nevertheless, they came pretty close, and in 1927 the Communists and their allies even won 7% of the vote, much their best result in the whole interwar period.

The Polish regime was therefore highly authoritarian but, in contrast to the fascist states, opposition was not completely suppressed. Even the Communists were able to carry on some political activities and had been increasing their influence in the mid 1930s, a period of rising industrial militancy. Workers, particularly in the textile industry, adopted the tactic of the factory occupation with such frequency that it even became known as the 'Polish strike', reaching its peak in 1937 when official statistics recorded 2,639 factories occupied, with 137,000 workers involved. From 1935 the Comintern policy of broad unity against the danger of fascism enabled the Communists to improve their relations with others on the left. They formed an electoral pact with the Socialists and other left forces which achieved a major breakthrough in local elections in 1936 when it won control of Lodz, Poland's second city.

Then tragedy struck. During Stalin's purges, almost all the Polish Communists in the Soviet Union were executed or imprisoned. In June 1938 the party was actually dissolved *in toto* by the Comintern. The exact reasons are unclear. Manuilsky, speaking at the Soviet party congress in March 1939, claimed that 'agents of Polish fascism managed to get positions of leadership'. They had apparently 'tried to get the party to support Pilsudski's fascist coup in May 1926'.<sup>10</sup> It certainly could be argued that the Polish Communists had committed a political mistake, but that is a long way from proving that it was due to the activities of fascist agents. There was, however, no further evidence for the alleged conspiracy.

If this was Stalin's crime, then there were plenty that were ultimately the responsibility of the Polish regime. Perhaps its most infamous record was on nationalities policy. About a third of the

population were not Poles and they all had grounds for complaint. The Jews had a particularly rough time at the hands of viciously prejudiced government bodies. Their plight gained international recognition in the early summer of 1919 when the Polish army was pushing eastwards into predominantly Lithuanian and Byelorussian areas. As the US government was giving food aid to Poland at the time, it felt obliged to send a mission to investigate complaints of brutality and discrimination against Jews. Its members came back with the impression that both the Polish and the Red armies were extremely brutal with each other's soldiers. The Polish army, however, had quite clearly gone beyond that.

In the towns to the east of Bialystok, the general picture was of a sharp separation of the population into different nationality groups. Food was quite obviously unfairly distributed to the detriment of Jews who made up almost half of the populations of some of these towns. They were subjected by the new Polish authorities to an atmosphere of threats and intimidation. The worst treatment, however, came from the army. On entering Lida on 17 April 1919, troops broke into houses and shops stealing and plundering Jewish property. 39 men and woman were shot or bayoneted by soldiers 'for no other reason than that the lust for blood was on them'.<sup>11</sup> In Vilnius, two days later, 69 Jews were murdered in a similar way. Any attempt to complain about this had met with blank indifference from the new civilian authorities.

There was nothing new in pogroms in this area. The tsarist regime had exploited deep rooted anti-Jewish feelings to incite even more horrific massacres as a means to undermine the 1905 revolution. Even before that violence against Jews had been commonplace. A Polish Jew writing shortly before 1800 could conclude that 'there is perhaps no other country besides Poland, where religious freedom and religious enmity are to be met with in equal degree'.<sup>12</sup> The Jewish community was allowed to exist, he concluded, because it was vital to the economy. At the same time there was an extraordinary depth of superstitious prejudice systematically encouraged and promoted by the Catholic church. Jews were accused of a low level of morality and even of ritual murder of Christians so that, whenever a child died from mysterious causes, there could be a dreadful 'retribution' against the Jewish community. This was given added justification by the church's view that Jews as a whole were *collectively* responsible for the death of Christ.

Neither were the events of 1919 the only signs of official anti-Jewish

attitudes in post-First World War Poland. Government policy actually became one of trying to ruin Jews economically and thus force them to emigrate. In the late 1930s peasants were encouraged to boycott Jewish shops and to patronise only those bearing signs such as 'this is a Christian shop'. This was enforced by intimidation of those Poles who broke the boycott and was accompanied by more direct violence towards the Jews themselves. In Bialystok region alone in 1936, there were, according to the Prime Minister at the time, 21 pogroms.<sup>13</sup> Even after the Second World War, although this was in no way officially encouraged, there were pogroms against some of the few Jews who returned to reclaim their property. It was only recently admitted again that 45 were massacred in Kielce in 1945. The old superstitions provided the pretext again.

The treatment of Jews can hardly be seen as an aberration within an otherwise laudable prewar Polish republic. It was only the most unpalatable aspect of a society characterised by arbitrary police and army power, privilege and wealth for a minority, and repression and harassment of nationalities and social movements.

### *War and resistance*

In March 1939 the German army occupied Prague and the Czechoslovak state was destroyed. A few months later demands were made on Polish territory and on 1 September 1939, German armies attacked Poland.

Britain and France had promised this time to oppose Nazi expansion and they did declare war on Germany, but they provided no serious military assistance. Poland was left to fight an unequal battle alone. With only 300 tanks and 400 largely obsolete aircraft it had to confront an army equipped with 2,500 tanks and 2,000 aircraft. Despite heroic resistance, Poland was effectively subdued after five weeks. In that time the German armies lost about 45,000 men, roughly half their total losses prior to the invasion of the USSR.

On 17 September, when Polish defeat seemed certain, Soviet forces occupied the Eastern part of the country in which Ukrainians and Byelorussians formed the majority. It was justified at the time as an act by the Soviet people that rendered 'aid to their brothers groaning under the yoke of the Polish gentry, extricated 13 million working people from sanguinary slaughter, emancipated them from capitalist slavery ... and secured for them freedom of national and cultural development'.<sup>14</sup>

It was, however, undertaken with the full agreement of Nazi Germany. The non-aggression treaty signed by Molotov and Ribbentrop in Moscow on 23 August 1939 contained an additional secret protocol which was revealed from the German archives after the war. In it an agreement was reached to resolve 'by means of a friendly understanding' the question of 'whether the interests of both parties make the maintenance of an independent Polish state appear desirable'. They had even specified their respective 'spheres of interest' should they decide to eliminate the Polish state.<sup>15</sup>

There was, of course, every justification for the USSR trying to avoid an armed clash with the Nazi Germany after the West had shown its lack of interest in a system of collective security. The events of September 1939, however, went beyond that and caused deep bitterness among Poles. It seemed to the majority of Polish politicians that they faced two equally unpleasant enemies. In fact, the Polish minority in the areas incorporated into the USSR suffered severe repression. Many were put in prison camps while large numbers were deported to other parts of the Soviet Union. Members of other nationality groups who predominated among the peasants may, however, have in many cases welcomed the new situation. The new authorities adopted a policy of dividing up large estates to give land to the largest possible number of claimants. For a time at least, they deliberately avoided collectivisation, which had been so unpopular in the Soviet Union before, and even claimed that the idea was being advocated only by large landowners in an attempt to discredit the new regime. The policy adopted was, of course, intended as a means to win the absolute maximum support even at the expense of creating large numbers of smaller farms which the authorities believed were likely to be less productive. It became known as the 'Byelorussian' variant of land reform and provided the broad outline for policy in the rest of Eastern Europe in 1944 and 1945.<sup>16</sup>

The Nazi occupation strategy was incomparably harsher. The ultimate aim was the destruction of the Polish nation. As Hitler said on 22 August 1939: 'I keep my "Skull and Crossbones" formations ready to kill, without mercy or pity, men, women and children of Polish origin who speak the Polish language. That is the only way for us to get the living space we need.'<sup>17</sup> His policy involved a whole range of other less dramatic repressive measures starting with closing down schools, killing much of the intelligentsia and handing over businesses to new German owners. By 1941 the food ration for Poles was barely a quarter of the level for Germans. Jews did very much worse and

were the first to suffer the policy of systematic mass extermination which ultimately awaited the Slavonic nations. In all, about one fifth of Poland's pre-war population were killed by the Nazis; nearly half of these were Jews.

Not surprisingly, in view of the harshness of repression and of the strength of Polish national traditions, there was a strong desire to fight back. Hopes were kept alive by the formation of a government in exile under General Sikorski, who had become a firm opponent of Pilsudski. Its political base was much broader than the pre-war government as it incorporated all the main opponents of the *Sanacja*. Its main success was the creation of a sizeable Polish army based in the West. It was, however, united in hostility to the Soviet Union. Even after June 1941, Sikorski saw the USSR as no more than a temporary ally. He hoped and believed that it would be seriously weakened after the war. Poland could then emerge as part of a powerful Central European Federation. Much to the annoyance of Churchill, he therefore insisted on demanding the restoration of the pre-1939 Eastern frontier.

The conflict with Stalin came to a head in April 1943. The German government announced the discovery of a mass grave at Katyn near Smolensk containing the bodies of an estimated 3,000 – later raised to 12,000 – Polish army officers captured by the Red Army in 1939, allegedly proving that they had been murdered by the Soviet security forces. The Soviet authorities replied quickly claiming that the Polish soldiers had been doing 'construction work' in the area when it was overrun by the Nazis.

The Polish government in London, however, could not accept the Soviet explanation. For it the discovery of the bodies answered a baffling mystery. It had reached an agreement with the Soviet government in July 1941 that was to be the basis for creating a Polish army in the Soviet Union out of the 181,000 prisoners of war captured in September 1939. Unfortunately, only a handful of officers appeared when these prisoners were released. Sikorski had pressed Stalin on the whereabouts of the remainder during a meeting in Moscow in December 1941, but the Polish transcript indicates that Stalin was quite adamant that 'all Poles have been released'. Any still missing, he argued, must have escaped, possibly to Manchuria. Subsequent Polish inquiries drew similarly blank responses.<sup>17a</sup>

There seemed to be a particular cause for concern because it was known that about 15,000 Polish citizens, including the missing officers, had been held in three special prison camps. They almost all

stopped corresponding with relatives in April 1940 when the camps were dissolved. The minority who survived knew nothing of where they had been taken.

The Polish government in London therefore called for an International Red Cross investigation. Its request was received in Geneva two days after a similar one from the German government. The Soviet response was to accuse the Polish government of collusion with the Nazis and of 'making use of the slanderous Hitlerite fake for the purpose of wresting territorial concessions'.<sup>18</sup> They therefore decided to sever diplomatic relations.

Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, tried to persuade the Poles to moderate their stand, and they did withdraw the request for the Red Cross investigation. Nevertheless, Sikorski was adamant in private that 'unfortunately, the German revelations were true'.<sup>19</sup> The weight of evidence, although not conclusive, is on his side. The German authorities conducted their own investigation and invitations were accepted by an international commission made up of medical experts from countries occupied by or allied to Nazi Germany plus one from neutral Switzerland, and by a team from the Red Cross in occupied Poland which spent five weeks at the scene and was apparently given considerable freedom to carry out its own investigation. Journalists from a number of countries also visited the graves.

The German and Polish investigators produced detailed reports putting the number of bodies at slightly over 4,000 and that, alongside other evidence, suggested that they all came from only one of the Soviet camps. Much scientific and medical evidence was accumulated on the approximate time of the deaths and it all pointed to Soviet guilt. A crucial further point was that no written material was found dated later than May 1940.

A subsequent official Soviet team issued a report in January 1944 signed by prominent medical, scientific and church leaders.<sup>20</sup> It challenged some of the earlier evidence on the time of the deaths and claimed that nine later documents had been found on exhumed bodies proving that the massacre took place in the autumn of 1941. The investigation, however, was comparatively brief taking only seven days to exhume and examine 925 bodies. Moreover, although citizens of other countries were able to see the graves and a number of exhibits, the investigation itself was a purely Soviet affair. Not even Polish Communists took part.

The Soviet report also contained an embarrassing mistake. One of its crucial claims was that 500 Russian prisoners of war had been used

by the Nazis to search the bodies for documents dated after April 1940. The evidence for this was the testimony of a witness who claimed to have met an escaped prisoner in March 1943 who was then recaptured and disappeared without trace along with the other prisoners. He, however, had somehow been able to recount these events that he claimed took place in April 1943, although that was *after* his recapture.

Another surprising point was the failure of the Soviet report to mention that the bullets used were of German manufacture. That finding in itself proved nothing, because they could have been bought by the Soviet Union or captured from the Polish army, but it occupied a prominent place in later Soviet propaganda about Katyn. The fact was discovered by the Red Cross delegation from occupied Poland who later sent the information to the Nuremberg trials in 1946. It was also recorded by Goebbels in a diary entry for 8 May 1943. While not in any way suggesting that the Nazis had been responsible for the massacre, he insisted that the discovery should be kept as secret as possible as he was aware that it could destroy the propaganda impact of Katyn. The Soviet failure to notice so useful a fact suggests either a phenomenal Nazi effort to remove the evidence or that the Soviet investigation was far from thorough. It reinforces the suspicion that it may have been deliberately superficial.

The Soviet case, based on that investigation, did not stand up at Nuremberg. The German officer named by Soviet witnesses as the main criminal was prepared to testify and insisted that he only came to the Smolensk area at a later date. The Soviet prosecution implicitly accepted this evidence and switched to claim that his predecessors had been responsible. In the end the case was dropped on the technical grounds that the Soviet side had provided no clear evidence for the time of the deaths or for their claim that there were 11,000 bodies.

In one sense the whole Katyn affair is quite extraordinary. The Nazis were guilty of countless horrific atrocities against the Polish people and yet the great majority of Poles undoubtedly believe that the Soviet Union was responsible and they feel bitter about it even today. For many of them this is simply a reflection of a desire to blame the USSR for their misfortunes whenever possible, but it is given further justification by the appearance of a cover up. If the whole incident had been more openly investigated, and any possible Soviet blame accepted, then it could never have remained a festering sore in relations between the Soviet and Polish peoples.

In 1943 it undoubtedly caused extreme bitterness. The belief that

Poland faced two enemies was fully reflected in the domestic resistance. The overwhelming majority were organised in the Home Army owing allegiance to the London-based government. Following the Katyn revelations, there was a decision to reduce operations against the German military and 'especially against the communication lines leading to the East'.<sup>21</sup> Instead, attacks were to be directed against security and administrative organs.

A new threat to this cautious policy came from the revival of Communist activity in the form of the Polish Workers' Party (PWP). Its leaders were Communists who had had the good fortune to be in Polish prisons in 1938. They arrived in the Soviet Union after Poland had collapsed and returned home in 1941. Formed in January 1942, the new party's policies were similar to those advocated for other Communist Parties at the time by the Soviet leadership. It was not affiliated to the Comintern, which was itself dissolved in June 1943, and its leaders were strongly advised to avoid the sectarian attitudes of the pre-war party and especially its evasiveness on the national question. The ultimate aim was socialist revolution but the immediate objective was broad national unity as the most effective means to fight the Nazis. The PWP sought to cooperate with the London government but differed on two crucial points. The first was that it saw Poland winning independence *in alliance with* the Soviet Union, and that effectively meant at the expense of the Eastern territories. The second point was that it urged immediate, active armed resistance. This won a lot of sympathy and led the other resistance groups to change their approach.

By early 1944 it looked as if it could initiate an uprising alone. Although numerically much weaker than Western oriented groups, it could certainly expect help from the Red Army and the Polish army of 80,000 men which had been formed in the Soviet Union in 1943 primarily out of those Polish prisoners of war who had chosen not to accept the option of going to the West. The Home Army which anyway contained many who did not agree in total with the London government, might then disintegrate with its members joining the units that seemed to be fighting the Nazis most effectively.

The likelihood of this was increased by the London government's continuing refusal to accept the post-1939 frontiers. Churchill was led to condemn it publicly and, in July 1944, Soviet recognition was given to the so-called Lublin government. Dominated by the PWP, it accepted the Curzon line as the Eastern frontier and argued for Polish territory to be extended westward at Germany's expense.

This was the background to the Warsaw uprising which was initiated by the commanders of the Home Army on 1 August 1944. Although aimed militarily against the Nazis, in political terms it was directed against the Soviet Union. The hope was to preempt the Communists from establishing themselves in Warsaw, and also to strengthen the credibility of the London government. This, it was naïvely believed, might force Stalin to recognise it again and persuade the West to press Poland's territorial claims in the East.

There was therefore no attempt at coordination with the Soviet forces advancing towards Warsaw. Naturally, the great mass of the population, irrespective of political views, gave full support to the nation's greatest single act of resistance. Unfortunately, that could not prevent final defeat in early October. Nearly 200,000 Poles died in the fighting and the remainder were deported as the Nazis set about the systematic and total destruction of the city. This had almost been completed when in January 1945 Polish and Soviet troops finally arrived.

At the time it was believed by many Poles that the Red Army had betrayed them by deliberately abstaining from helping the uprising. This has continued to be a sore point, but it cannot be proven in the absence of information from Soviet archives.

It is certainly true that the Soviet forces stopped their advance in early August, but there is very strong evidence that that was because they had suffered heavily from a successful German counter-attack. This was not recognised by the Polish government in London. It was being claimed publicly that the Soviet authorities *had* been adequately informed of the preparations for the uprising. They were therefore being accused of deliberately reneging on their promise to help.<sup>22</sup>

Stalin took obvious offence at this 'slanderous campaign ... in the Polish press'. When asked for help by Mikolajczyk, the Polish Prime Minister in London, he replied on 16 August 1944 that he had become 'convinced that the Warsaw action ... is a reckless adventure causing useless victims among the inhabitants'. The Soviet command had therefore decided 'only to disclaim any responsibility for the Warsaw adventure'.<sup>23</sup> He also expressed no interest in helping British or US aircraft drop supplies by allowing them the use of Soviet airfields. He referred to the uprising's leaders, in a message to Roosevelt and Churchill on 22 August, as a 'handful of power-seeking criminals'.<sup>24</sup> That suggests that he wanted the uprising to fail and he made no explicit mention of military difficulties, but he did add a final comment that the Soviet offensive would be resumed as soon as possible.

It is not clear why this did not happen in late August. It was accepted by some of the Polish underground leaders that Rokossovsky, the commander of the Soviet forces, may still have been in a weak position militarily. Moreover, this was a time of uprisings in other countries, and Soviet forces were suddenly presented with the opportunity for a rapid advance through Rumania. It is also not clear why more aid did not come from the West. Stalin was certainly slow to give his approval, but it has been argued that Britain and the US had no real sympathy for the uprising either.<sup>25</sup> It is certainly still not proven that Stalin deliberately and cold-bloodedly allowed the Nazis to destroy his political enemies in Warsaw.

The immediate effect of this episode was to discredit the Home Army and the Mikolajczyk government. The policy of 'two enemies' had led to disaster and support therefore grew for the more realistic approach of the Lublin government. Even in 1944, however, with the Soviet Union liberating Poland from the Nazis, it did not leave the PWP with an easy road to power.

Although the Home Army was partly a demoralised force and was formally disbanded in January 1945, guerrilla warfare continued for a number of years. The Soviet view even before that had been that the Home Army was a potential threat to its rear, and its members were arrested whenever possible. At times the Red Army and NKVD, the Soviet security police, took away thousands of Polish citizens in single operations.

Under these difficult circumstances, PWP policy was developed in consultation with the Soviet leadership. Stalin's aim was to ensure that he had a totally reliable regime in Poland, but it ideally should be a stable regime broadly acceptable to the Polish people. He therefore tried to find a basis for an agreement between the PWP and Mikolajczyk who had become Prime Minister in the London government after Sikorski's death in July 1943 and who was less hostile to the USSR than most of his colleagues. Stalin argued that 'Poland should be ... a strong democratic and independent country ruled by all democratic elements within the framework of a government of national unity'.<sup>26</sup>

Mikolajczyk, however, was not prepared to take the earliest opportunity to return home, fearing that he would simply be put in prison.<sup>27</sup> It was certainly a part of Stalin's strategy that the PWP should maintain a firm grip on the new organs of power and they took the key posts in the new police force. At the same time, however, they combined this with serious attempts to achieve a broadening of the

new government's political base. They encouraged the emergence of a new Socialist Party and of a Peasant Party although in both cases trusted Communists were planted in their organisations.

During the spring of 1945 it was clear that, despite all the Polish government's own efforts and the problems faced by its opponents, it still lacked a firm popular base. The Socialist Party grew rapidly and started acting independently. The security situation was deteriorating and there may have been as many as 80,000 armed men opposing the new government. Gomulka, the PWP General Secretary, saw the problem as partly stemming from continued dependence on Soviet forces. Even the new Polish army was staffed by Soviet officers owing, of course, to the absence of Polish ones. Poland's history made people particularly sensitive to the 'deportations and mistakes the Soviet organs have made'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the NKVD and Red Army were beyond any Polish control and were quite capable of arresting people who were negotiating with the Polish Communists.

These difficulties were made worse by sectarianism within the PWP. The differences were brought out at a meeting of its Central Committee on 20-21 May 1945<sup>29</sup>. Some of the speakers complained about the problems caused by an attitude which welcomed repressive measures and saw no need to make any compromises with other political forces. In its most extreme form it led to the demand for incorporation into the USSR which had been expressed at some meetings. This was even aggressively advocated by Soviet advisers who, the party secretary in Silesia reported, were posing the direct question 'Are you in favour of the 17th Republic?' At the same time Red Army commanders were summoning the representatives of other parties and giving them orders.

Gomulka strongly opposed this approach and was also highly critical of his own security forces for acting independently and arrogantly towards the population and becoming 'a state within a state'. Other party leaders were sceptical of the use of 'plants' inside other parties as the practice only generated distrust. It was suggested that they should be only 'for information purposes and certainly not for executing policy'. There was also a feeling that there should be more emphasis on the differences between the new Polish political structure and that of the Soviet Union. The hope evidently was that, by changing their approach, they could win more support and reduce their dependence on the Soviet security forces which was itself a major source of unpopularity.

Gomulka was therefore very sharp with his opponents within the

party, insisting at a conference of party functionaries on 27 May 1945 'that democratic power in Poland can be lasting only when it possesses the support of the majority of the people. No one can rule against his own people for long, no government can stand against its people.'<sup>30</sup> At the same time he had trouble reconciling this with his determination that the PWP should cling on to power despite the narrowness of its base.

The dilemma he faced was clear even when the government's base was broadened in June 1945 following an agreement of the great powers. Mikolajczyk returned to head a new government. The majority of government posts went to non-Communists and free elections were promised. However, Gomulka left no doubt about who really ran the country. 'We will never surrender the power we have seized,' he insisted during negotiations with Mikolajczyk. Should agreement prove impossible on a government of national unity, then the Communists were prepared to manage without him even if it meant relying on the NKVD. In the meantime, Gomulka made it clear that Mikolajczyk was being offered only such government posts as the PWP considered 'expendable'.<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES

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## 2 From Polish Road to Stalinist Model

### *The Polish road to socialism*

The emerging new Poland had undergone momentous changes in comparison with the pre-war republic. Not only had the political complexion of the government changed completely, but the country itself had been shifted to the west with its frontier on the Oder-Niesse Line. Backward agricultural areas had been lost to the Soviet Union while more industrialised territories had been gained from Germany.

Over the next few years the German population, in so far as it had not already fled, was expelled and its land was taken by Poles. 1.5 million people came from the land ceded to the USSR while more came from other parts of Poland. This represented an important social change. The land-hunger of the peasants was being satisfied and the Communists, who kept a firm grip on resettlement policy, could claim much of the credit. Moreover, it ensured that Germany remained the principal potential enemy. Internationally it helped tie Poland to the Soviet Union whose leaders committed themselves to the new frontier while the West equivocated.

It also significantly changed the character of the Polish state. Previously there had been significant national minorities. Now the population was over 98% Polish. Moreover, they almost all owed allegiance to the Roman Catholic church which had a special place in the nation's history. The 'conversion' of Poland took place when the state was first founded in the tenth century. Although some Poles were attracted to other religions in later centuries, their numbers were very small by the eighteenth century. During the time of partition, despite Vatican support for the ruling authorities, the Polish clergy frequently supported the national cause and themselves suffered especially from the policy of Russification. In later years they did not support militant workers' movements and generally allied with the right wing in the inter-war period. Pilsudski was able to win their broad approval for his *Sanacja* government.

During the war, however, there was no doubt where they stood. The Nazis made it clear that, as part of their policy of destroying the

Polish nation, the clergy had to be liquidated alongside the rest of the intelligentsia. About a fifth of all priests were killed.

There was therefore every likelihood that religion would continue to be a powerful influence in Polish life. That was to create special problems for the Communists later. More immediately, the post-war government was confronted with a picture of horrific destruction. No country suffered more severe damage than Poland. 38% of the national wealth had been destroyed and the newly acquired Western territories were in ruins. The first task was to start reconstructing the ruined cities and villages.

The immensity of this task underlined the need for the PWP to continue with the approach it had evolved under Gomulka of trying, as far as possible, to broaden support for the new regime. It won further theoretical legitimacy when, in 1946, Stalin outlined his ideas on different roads to socialism. His first published statement on the subject was from a conversation with leaders of the British Labour Party, paraphrased by the party's secretary Morgan Phillips in the *Daily Herald* of 22 August 1946. Stalin was reported as saying that 'there were two roads to Socialism ... the Russian way and the British way ... The Russian road was shorter but more difficult, and had involved bloodshed – but he wanted us to remember that Marxist-Leninists did not think that theirs was the *only* way to Socialism. The Parliamentary method involved no bloodshed, but it was a longer process.' Phillips felt this to be very important because, if Stalin's views were more widely recognised, 'it would go a long way towards ending the internecine conflicts which are holding up progress in some countries because of a desire to create a one-Party State.'

Stalin's comments were not purely a tactical device to placate Labour Party leaders in an effort to improve British-Soviet relations. He repeated similar ideas to Communist leaders involved in coalition governments. Gottwald, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, was advised to avoid the 'Russian road' if possible. In the new situation following the defeat of Nazi Germany, Stalin suggested that there was a real possibility in a number of Eastern European countries of a special road to socialism 'which need not lead through the Soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat'.<sup>1</sup> The French Communist leader, Maurice Thorez, argued in an interview in *The Times* on 18 November 1946 that in France, too, other possibilities for a road to socialism existed.

Gomulka soon followed and elaborated his ideas on a 'Polish road to socialism'. This could have helped to overcome the distrust

Morgan Phillips had referred to, thereby bringing the PWP closer to the Socialists, but there were still obstacles as Gomulka was definitely still aiming to keep a firm grip on the key organs of power. Nevertheless, he was not trying to eliminate potential opposition and he was prepared to accept a gradual process of change to his conception of socialism.

The theory of the specific Polish road was developed in considerable detail in relation to socio-economic changes. Land reform had been emphasised from the start by the Lublin government. It showed that Polish Communists had definitely abandoned their mistake of 1920. Instead, they were following the example of the Soviet authorities in Byelorussia in 1939. The ultimate effect of dividing up large farms and of settling the newly acquired territories was the expansion of 250,000 small existing holdings and the creation of 814,000 new farms which were given predominantly to former landless labourers.<sup>2</sup> That meant that 40% of Polish farmers had benefited and they were encouraged to believe that the new state would defend their private property as Gomulka insisted at a Central Committee meeting in October 1945: 'We are socialising the economy in the towns, but we do not want and we do not intend to collectivise it in the villages.' His aim was a new road for the countryside: 'Neither the *Kolkhoz* nor the cooperative that exists in the capitalist countries.'<sup>3</sup>

The other major revolutionary measure was the nationalisation of industry. Workers' councils – dominated by Communists and Socialists – took power from the collapsing Nazi authorities in places of work and initiated attempts to revive the shattered economy. They also had a very powerful voice in the choice of new managers many of whom were ordinary workers given a quick training for their new posts.

The immediate importance of the nationalisation decree of January 1946 was therefore to give legal sanction to this process and to prevent the prewar owners from reclaiming their former property. It ensured that over 90% of industrial output came from the public sector and, of great significance for the future, it ensured that the state had control over the key sectors of the economy. It also had a considerable influence over private agriculture through pricing and investment policies.

This was the decisive point. Although the state controlled directly only a minority of total production, because the economy was dominated by private agriculture, it was still judged possible to begin economic planning. The socio-economic changes had apparently

taken Poland a long way towards socialism which, at that time, was effectively equated with state control over the economy. Further development could be a gradual, evolutionary process rather than an armed uprising and seizure of power as the Comintern had insisted before. A Three Year Plan to restore the economy to its pre-war level was therefore worked out by Socialist and Communist economists. It was claimed to be an extraordinary success, with industrial production back to its prewar level and living standards rising rapidly.

This more gradual approach, and the acceptance of the need to reach agreement with other political forces, may have helped to ease the security situation, but it did not eliminate the broad base for opposition to the PWP. In fact, Mikolajczyk had already decided in the autumn of 1945 that he had the potential strength to challenge the Communists politically. He formed a new Peasant Party and quickly won support. Landowners and others who feared change saw it as the surest barrier against the Communists. Peasants were attracted to it by fears and rumours that collectivisation was imminent. By 1946 it had more than twice the membership of the PWP and there were signs that the Socialists might seek to ally with Mikolajczyk around a platform implying full independence from foreign connections instead of a specially close alliance with the USSR.

The Communists were able to swing the balance by a referendum seeking support for the new Western frontier, for land reform and nationalisations and for constitutional changes. The effect was to split the Peasant Party. It had decided to oppose the abolition of the senate, but over 68% of the voters supported this measure. That was a major boost to the Communists and their 'Democratic Bloc' which contained the Socialists and various other parties. Their campaign for a 'three times yes' vote had been overwhelmingly supported. They remained united in the campaign for the general election which took place in January 1947 and gave them over 80% of the votes.

It is difficult to know how to interpret this result. There were at the time accusations of widespread intimidation, and Peasant Party candidates were accused of collaborating with underground organisations and disqualified in a number of important areas.

Nevertheless, even that should not ensure a majority for a very unpopular government if a popular opposition is allowed to stand. Many Poles today suggest that there must have been ballot rigging on an enormous scale, but there were also grounds for people to vote for a Communist-led government. Social and economic changes could obviously win some support but the most important issue was the

existence and security of the Polish state. Following the horrors of the Nazi occupation, national independence had been restored. The alliance with the Soviet Union seemed to many people to be the essential basis for foreign relations. Politicians placing any faith in the West were seriously weakened by US government statements indicating that they did not regard the Oder-Neisse Line as a permanent frontier with Germany.

Nevertheless, Polish Communist leaders more recently have not denied that they could not have won a referendum on the crucial issue of their right to hold power. In the words of Adam Lopatka, an alternative member of the PUWP Central Committee, speaking at a conference organised by *World Marxist Review* and reported in its September 1979 issue: 'The working class party had sufficient support to take and hold power, but in that period it did not have a majority on its side.'

The following months saw a consolidation of Communist power. An amnesty for members of the resistance marked the end of the effective state of civil war. Then Mikolajczyk, his party discredited by its failure to hold back the PWP, left the country. He had become frightened by trials in which he was named as an instigator of armed opposition to the government. The Socialists, who had joined the Democratic Bloc partly in the hope that they could thereby dissuade the Communists from taking power alone, were hit by a purge and show trials of some of their leaders on espionage charges. In December 1948 the two working-class parties finally merged into the Polish United Workers' Party which left Communists very firmly in control.

At that time Communists still generally assumed that socialism required effectively a one-party state as existed in the Soviet Union. It was therefore easy to welcome the elimination of all opposition and to regard it as a great victory. It was, however, to have tragic consequences many of which could have been avoided by continuing with Gomulka's Polish road.

The point was that, although Gomulka was no believer in an idealised model of perfect democracy, his strategy did involve tolerating some diversity of views for the foreseeable future. The PWP therefore had to *win* support, in competition with other parties and political forces, and that had a powerful disciplining effect. It had to keep in close contact with its working class base and it had to advocate policies that could command wider popularity.

There was always a strong trend within the party that was

uninterested in any attempt to proceed by democratic means. It could therefore advocate such measures as immediate collectivisation of agriculture for which there was minimal public support. The expression of such proposals discredited the PWP and made Gomulka's task more difficult, but they could not become dominant until after the party had established a monopoly of power.

The speeding up of changes and the switch towards more repressive policies partly reflected internal economic difficulties, but the most important factor was the beginnings of the cold war in the late 1940s.

In mid-1947, the Polish government was invited to a preliminary meeting to discuss possible US aid to Europe under what became known as the Marshall Plan. Its initial response was to accept, but this was vetoed by Stalin who saw the whole plan as part of an attempt to isolate the USSR from its new allies. He was probably right. US State Department policy at the time was to give no assistance to governments containing Communist Ministers.

The Soviet response to this US initiative was to tie its allies more closely, and a new instrument — the Informbureau or Cominform — was established in September 1947. Its members were ruling Communist Parties from Eastern Europe plus the French and Italian parties. It was not presented as a revival of the old Comintern which had been dissolved in 1943. It was not to be a centre for world revolution and neither was it intended to give directives to member organisations. Nevertheless, Gomulka's suspicions were aroused from the start and it generally did encourage all its members to pursue more sectarian policies. It was dissolved shortly after the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956.

In mid-1948 the Cominform issued a unanimous condemnation of the Yugoslav party, whose representatives refused to attend the meeting. At the time this was a sensation. Yugoslavia had been seen as the model among the People's Democracies. It was even beginning the collectivisation of agriculture, but now it was condemned for falling victim to a 'petty-bourgeois nationalist deviation'. In effect, the charge was that Yugoslavia was not following the road to socialism outlined in various of Stalin's writings. The same accusation could have been made with greater force against Communists in other East European countries, including Poland.

Probably the main issue was Stalin's concern to consolidate his bloc. Tito in Yugoslavia was actually a potential threat to that and he was even contemplating a federation with Bulgaria which would have made his position still stronger. The effect, however, was to begin the

search for 'bourgeois nationalists' throughout Eastern Europe. That meant Communists who might be unwilling to accept complete subordination to the USSR.

In Poland the main target was Gomulka. In September 1948 he was removed from his post as PWP General Secretary. In 1951 he was charged with subversive activity and imprisoned. To judge from the initial accusations made against him and from the self criticism that was dragged out of him, the crucial issue was the possibility of pursuing a road to socialism different from and, as far as possible, independently of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> Despite the unreliability of such evidence in other cases, it does seem that this source provides a fair summary of the issues. Gomulka had put some of the same views earlier in 1948 and they were referred to again in 1956.

There was criticism of attempts in 1944 to build broad national unity which amounted apparently to 'underestimating the significance of the armed might of the Soviet Union'. Of more immediate relevance, Gomulka was accused of compromising with the ideological heritage of the Socialists in his proposals for the basis on which the two parties should merge. He suggested that their attitude to national independence was more realistic than that of the Polish Communist Party who had either ignored it or linked it entirely with proletarian revolution. In reply it was insisted that the Socialist Party's conception had been a bourgeois democratic one and it was somewhat simplistically claimed that Polish independence in 1918 was a result of the Russian Revolution. It was certainly true that the new Bolshevik regime declared firm support for the right of nations to self determination. It also agreed to give Poland immediate independence; but that was hardly of decisive importance when Poland was largely German occupied at the time and when the Polish Communists took so weak a line on the national question.

Another issue, raised very clearly by the Yugoslav resolution, was the collectivisation of agriculture. Gomulka believed that the existing socio-economic structure provided a sound basis for evolution towards socialism. Stalin, however, placed great emphasis on Lenin's statement that private enterprise continually breeds capitalism and hence political opponents of socialism. The conclusion he drew was that agriculture should be collectivised as quickly as possible. This was one of the central areas in the disagreements over roads to socialism in the late 1940s. A closely related issue was Stalin's assertion that the class struggle *intensifies* during socialist construction. As we shall see, this provided the theoretical justification

for a blindly repressive regime.

The issue, then, was not the need for a close alliance with USSR. Gomulka never doubted that. The issue was whether there was any scope for recognising the distinct Polish national traditions and whether the Polish road to socialism could deviate significantly from Stalin's conception of the road taken by the Soviet Union. Thanks to the impact of the Cominform, the answers to both these questions seemed to be no. In fact, the most significant theoretical work in that period on the revolutions in Eastern Europe was a pamphlet by A.I. Sobolev<sup>5</sup> who managed to argue that their only new features were due to the presence of the Red Army and the existence of the Soviet Union. Apart from that they apparently added nothing of substance to Lenin's ideas on the 1905 Revolution. Such a view, of course, could only be reached by turning a totally blind eye to Stalin's statements in 1946 and to the ideas and practices evolved by Gomulka and other Eastern European leaders in the period from 1944 to 1948.

### *The Stalinist regime in Poland*

The new political structure that emerged differed in some superficial respects from that of the Soviet Union – for example in the existence of several political parties – but its essence was said to be the same and it was officially defined as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

In fact, it was characterised by the concentration of power in the PUWP and especially in its top leadership, which in turn was closely tied to the Soviet leaders. The extent of Soviet influence was exemplified by the appointment of Marshal Rokossovsky as Minister of Defence and member of the party Political Bureau in 1949. Although a Pole by origin he had lived for a long time in the USSR and become one of the Red Army's most distinguished commanders.

Other parties continued to exist but had no real autonomy; they could not formulate their own programmes and contest for power. Parliamentary elections were held in October 1952 but with a single list of candidates, including some from all the legal parties. Strong pressures were put on everyone to vote and also to adopt the practice of open voting. This meant making it public that they were endorsing the official candidate. Those that failed to do so could fear persecution afterwards. Not surprisingly, 99.8% supported the official lists. There were, of course, no opponents to confirm that the votes were counted fairly. Parliament itself rarely met and anyway acted as no more than a rubber stamp for proposals decided by the leadership. It was in no

sense a forum for debate and discussion.

Other organisations, such as trade unions, continued to exist as nominally independent bodies, but most of them were just 'transmission belts' to make party policy more acceptable to the population. In fact, key posts within them were typically decided by party committees at the appropriate level through a system which became known, after its Russian name, as the *nomenklatura*. That ensured the subordination of other organisations to the party leadership and meant that there were no formal channels for people to express their possible opposition to aspects of government policy.

The elimination of all possible opposition was followed very rapidly by important changes in the internal life and nature of the party. It became very much the party for those in positions of power. It grew to about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million members in 1950, i.e. 5% of the total population, and the proportion of state and party officials rose from 11% in the PWP in 1945 to 40% in the united party in 1953. It did retain a significant broader base: about half the members were classified as manual workers in the early 1950s, indicating a degree of public support, but there was very little scope for ordinary members to influence policy.

In fact, many of the more active workers were quickly promoted to positions of authority and that weakened the party's contacts with its original mass base. There were, of course, many people who joined the party simply for a career: they could easily get through any screening by repeating the dogmatic formulations current in the Stalin period.

The most serious problem, however, was the ease with which prominent party officials — using their links with security forces — could crush any criticism from within the party and eliminate people who, on grounds of background or even some personal characteristic, they happened to dislike. As all outside opposition had been eliminated, they no longer needed to seek active support from the mass of the people or from other parties. Neither did they need help or approval from ordinary PUWP members. They could use the same repressive machinery inside the party as was used against political opponents outside.

This sort of practice occurred even in 1944, but the discipline imposed by the need to compete for power held it in check. Degeneration during and after 1948 was accelerated and given an especially ugly face by Stalin's ideas and methods, but that was not the only cause and neither did the denunciation of Stalin in 1956 mark a complete solution to the problem.<sup>6</sup>

An important factor at the time was the creation of an atmosphere

in which anyone disagreeing could be labelled a class enemy.

Khrushchev was later to relate this to Stalin's dictum, repeated *ad nauseam* by all Communist leaders after the condemnation of Yugoslavia in 1948, that the class struggle *intensifies* during the construction of socialism. This, of course, completely contradicted Gomulka's belief that, following the elimination of large landowners and big business, the road to socialism could be to a great extent a peaceful, evolutionary process. In practice, it created a theoretical basis for the search for enemies within the party.

The 'class enemy' was blamed for all the conflicts and problems even though many of them stemmed from the policies and mistakes of the Communist authorities. In its desperate bid to hold back socialism, the 'class enemy' was allegedly penetrating the party and causing chaos and confusion wherever it could. Thus Gomulka was at first accused of taking a position that would objectively serve to weaken the party in the face of its enemies. By 1951 he was being publicly accused of espionage, although no trial ever took place.

Under these circumstances, enormous reliance was placed on the security forces. They were in close contact with the NKVD in the Soviet Union and had widespread powers of arrest. There was very little control over them at the time. Even top party leaders were kept under surveillance and any who had had contacts with the West, for example veterans of the International Brigade in Spain, were likely to be imprisoned.

Fears of an enemy within were, of course, given greater credibility by the international situation. The cold war rapidly intensified culminating in open war in Korea. The USA and its Western allies were quite openly hostile to the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. However, that cannot excuse or fully explain the paranoid response of the last year of Stalin's life. In a number of countries it involved the imprisonment and torture of leading Communists. Their confessions were then used as the basis for show trials leading to death sentences on charges of espionage. In Poland things did not go quite that far. Gomulka was merely put under house arrest. In this respect, for what it was worth, Poland already appeared to be one of the most liberal of the people's democracies.

Moreover, there were areas that retained some autonomy. To some extent this was true of cultural and academic life. As in other Eastern European countries, the 'creative intelligentsia' was treated with considerable respect and the new regime prided itself on the expansion of education and literary works. Nevertheless, censorship and severe

restrictions were imposed. The regime was not content with literature which expressed a broadly progressive viewpoint. It was looking for the great works that would capture the spirit of the new era as perceived by the party leadership. As it was impossible for a great writer to take so naively rosy a view of reality, it was inevitable that the leaders were disappointed. Much of the expansion of publishing therefore involved translations, with Soviet works particularly prominent. This may well have meant that the intellectual horizons of the Polish people were being broadened quite significantly. Nevertheless, it was quite clear that a large part of the strong Polish national tradition was being repressed.

The only real independence was enjoyed by the Catholic church. Its relations with the state had been characterised by suspicion and recrimination, with a number of open conflicts. The authorities never tried to ban religion as such, but they may have been tempted into a harder stance in the early 1950s by the belief, held by many Communists at the time, that religion would quickly disappear. In practice, their immediate objective was to restrict the role of the church and to ensure that it could take no independent stand on important political issues. They therefore wanted declarations of loyalty to the state and of support for the broad outlines of government policy. In particular, they wanted help in mobilising the population for reconstruction work.

They were particularly frightened by the Vatican's attitude at the start of the cold war. It did not recognise Poland's new western frontier until the 1970s. Moreover, in 1949 the Pope decreed that no Catholic could participate in Communist organisations or read the Communist press. The government's response was to take over church land and a number of charitable organisations. The Polish church did not enforce the Pope's controversial decree, but there were accusations for some time that priests were using their pulpits to spread anti-Communist propaganda. A number were imprisoned for anti-state activities and, in 1953, a new decree gave the government the right to appoint and dismiss members of the clergy under certain circumstances. This sharpening conflict culminated in the house arrest of Cardinal Wyszynski in September 1953.

The church's view in the conflict was that religious freedom meant more than the right to worship. It also wanted an autonomous existence and a strong influence in the education of the young. Moreover it believed that, in an overwhelmingly Catholic country, opportunities for Catholics' should equal those of others.

It had no love for the 'atheist' regime. It could see no reason to comply with the government's demands for proclamations of total loyalty and thought the majority of the population agreed with this. Even more important, it could look back with satisfaction at Poland's past history. Governments and parties had come and gone, but the church seemed to be an absolutely permanent feature of Polish life. There was therefore no reason to declare loyalty to a government it did not welcome that had only existed for a few years. Appeals to help in reconstructing the country were therefore always worded very carefully so as to avoid any endorsement of the new regime.

By a similar reasoning, of course, it would have been foolish to back any of the opposition forces that had already suffered political defeat. There was a deeply held view in the church hierarchy that its survival could be jeopardised by commitment to a particular political position. Instead the Polish church thought it best to emphasise its base in the whole nation's history and to take a political stand only on those issues that affected it directly.

Alongside this cautious attitude from the church hierarchy, individual Catholics could hold a wide range of political views. The only legal Catholic political movement was Pax. It firmly supported the government's policies, claiming that a true Catholic should agree with the policies of the Communists. It disagreed with Marxist philosophy, but did not see this as an obstacle to cooperation. It thereby claimed to be playing a very important role. On the one hand, it was winning Catholics for socialism. At the same time, its leaders hoped they could persuade the Communists to give the church more respect and freedom. In practice, although they were given parliamentary representation, their influence was small and they were condemned as heretics by the Vatican.

The church's position therefore was, and still is, paradoxical. It enjoyed a great deal of traditional loyalty and obviously represented a different ideological view from the regime. At the same time, it was not an active political force either supporting or opposing the government.

More recent surveys give support to the view that the church could never enjoy such high standing if it took a more active role in politics. The overwhelming majority of Poles definitely still believe in God and most are regularly practising Catholics. Nevertheless, outside a small minority their opinions and personal values are formed quite independently of the church. A survey of employees in 1972 in a Warsaw factory, over 60% of whom were practising Catholics,

showed that religion was regarded as having no relevance to one's attitude towards the socialist system by 80%, while 8½% saw it as a reason to support socialism.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, only a small minority fully accepted the church's position on marriage, contraception and abortion. This may not have been so true in the early 1950s. Since then the numbers of non-believers have increased and in the 1970s there was also a larger group who continued to believe but had little contact with the church. The figures varied significantly between different surveys, but this latter group might include 25-30% of the population leaving under 10% confirmed atheists.

It is clear that religion continues to satisfy an important human need. Belief in God and in an after-life and the immortality of the soul seem to give a deeper meaning and purpose to people's lives and to allay many of their fears. This is particularly true of older and less educated people, but even among university teachers, a survey found under 30% 'non-believers', while 25% were practising Catholics.

Under these circumstances conflict between the church and the state probably only helped to elevate the church's standing as the only organisation not totally tied to the regime. It could also help to emphasise the gap between the mass of the population and the Communists. In fact, cynicism towards the regime grew especially after Stalin's death. Despite its claim to be a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' it actually offered no real political power at all to ordinary people. Some workers could benefit from possibilities for rapid promotion. Selection for higher education and for jobs in industry and the state apparatus was strongly biased in their favour. This was the policy of creating a 'new intelligentsia' which had been applied in the Soviet Union before. It created a group very firmly committed to the new regime, but it did not alter the position of the mass of workers.

In fact, Marx had never visualised socialism as involving this sort of one-party state. His writings show a lasting concern with the question of democracy. At the very beginning of his career he condemned restrictions on press freedom as 'the really deadly danger of man' and insisted that the media should not be subjected to outside control.<sup>8</sup>

He never changed this assessment and neither did he advocate, as a general principle, the suppression of parties opposed to socialism. This was Lenin's view too. At the time of the October revolution, he argued that parties should be able to compete with each other and that all should have freedom to publish their views. Even after the revolution, in January 1918, he claimed that it was a great merit of the Soviet

system that 'if the working people are dissatisfied with their party they can elect other delegates, hand over power to another party and change the government without any revolution at all'.

In the following years, conditions of civil war and a number of insurrections led to the suspension of these rights. There is ample evidence that Lenin genuinely saw the repressive measures as temporary, but they were never relaxed after his death. He certainly never provided a theoretical justification for a one-party state.

Lenin appeared as a great believer in both representative and *direct* democracy. The people were to have the power to choose all their officials and to remove those in authority should they so wish. This obviously suggests a completely different situation to the *nomenklatura* system whereby important posts are decided on exclusively by a leading party body.

Within the party too Lenin did not believe that there could be complete uniformity of views. He can even be quoted insisting that 'a struggle of *shades* in the party is *inevitable and essential*'. This was the situation for a time after 1917. Differences within the party leadership were openly aired and debated especially at party congresses. They did not prevent the party from acting in a united and decisive manner as indicated, above all, by its ability to lead and defend a revolution.

Even if Marxists before Stalin did not advocate an authoritarian, one-party state, they could not know of its full effects. These are now more obvious. The political system can be criticised for a whole number of reasons. It becomes extremely difficult to replace leaders if they become unpopular, or, more simply, if they become too old to govern competently. It is difficult to prevent abuses of power by leaders who can silence any critics. Irrespective of how clever the leaders are, they cannot guarantee the right decisions especially when they prevent public discussion of options and the expression of divergent viewpoints. A modern society is too complex to be run by a small leading group on its own.

The attempt to do so leads to a widening gulf between the rulers and the ruled. This is one of the great paradoxes of the European socialist countries. Despite the deep social changes and the elimination of the old, very wealthy, ruling class, there is still a strong 'them and us' feeling among the mass of population. This point is taken further in Chapter 3. A large part of it stems directly from the structure of political power. Ordinary working people, and this applies to party members too, can become deeply alienated from those in power. They

tend to feel that they are being manipulated by the leadership which treats them with contempt by ignoring their opinions and providing a censored view of reality.

If the system did allow for unbelievable economic advances, then the optimistic propaganda might be more acceptable. As we shall see, the autocratic political system is itself a major obstacle to economic advance.

It is impossible to know how much of a base the regime enjoyed in the early 1950s. There certainly was a lot of sympathy for the new Poland and for the ideas of socialism generally. A Polish state existed again and the country was being rebuilt out of the ruins left by the war. In addition, given the West's commitment to the restoration of a powerful West German state, the international situation tended to strengthen the government's standing.

On the other hand, the regime's apparent denial of Poland's cultural heritage, and its insistence that the Soviet Union provided the only adequate model for socialism in Poland, could hardly fail to generate antipathy. When thinking rationally, Poles could accept the USSR as an essential ally. Emotionally, however, there was and still is a strong tradition of anti-Russian feeling. To deny Poland full independence could only accentuate that feeling and further weaken the authority of the ruling party.

#### *Economic illusions shattered*

The most explosive source of discontent, however, was the failure to keep the promise of an economic miracle, as is indicated by the table below which contrasts the plan targets with what was actually achieved in the Six Year Plan period from 1950 to 1955. The objectives, as can be seen, were extremely ambitious. Poland, an economy at the 'middle' level of development with an industrial base in 1938 slightly behind that of Italy, was to be hurled forward with a massive investment drive. There certainly was a rapid increase in industrial output but, despite all the promises and all the hopes working people might have had in the new Poland, real wages hardly increased at all. Moreover, agricultural output grew too slowly in comparison with population.

TABLE I

Poland's Six Year Plan 1950-1955<sup>9</sup>  
(1949 = 100)

	<i>Planned</i>	<i>Achieved</i>
National income	212,3	173,5
Industrial output	258,3	271,7
Agricultural output	150	113
Real wages	140	104-113
Employment	160	156
Consumption per head	150-160	130-144

Part of the explanation for this failure was that the targets were too ambitious.

Optimism in 1950 was based on the success of the previous plan for economic reconstruction. Living standards had risen very rapidly and it was claimed that industrial production was back at the pre-war level. There was therefore said to be a sound basis for a programme of rapid industrialisation. To some extent the need for this was heightened by the intensification of the cold war in 1950 but that also made it much more difficult to achieve, because of the NATO embargo on sales of a wide range of goods to Eastern Europe. That, however, cannot explain the mistakes in economic policy that followed.

The crucial point was that, in the political atmosphere of the time, sobering voices could not be raised at all. Minc, the dominant figure in economic policy in the party leadership, made it clear what he thought of doubters. In a speech to the Central Committee in February 1951 he dismissed totally the suggestion that the rapid rate of growth in production was only possible during reconstruction. Poland, he wrongly claimed, had already overtaken Italy in large and medium industries. He had no doubt that in the very near future Poland could also overtake France. Those who had advocated a more realistic approach were dismissed for holding 'false and harmful views'.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, he was ignoring serious obstacles. Industry might have recovered, but agriculture had not. It was 1957 before the pre-war level of cereal production had been reached and 1965 before recovery was complete for cattle. Moreover, because of the enormous wartime losses, there was a serious obstacle to industrial expansion in the chronic shortage of highly qualified labour.

Despite this, the initial proposals from 1948 were made far more ambitious in July 1950; however, as investment rose in the early 1950s so the economy began to experience difficulties. Shortages of skilled labour and various raw materials forced the government to decide which industries would receive the supplies they needed. Priorities had to be selected.

In practice, the priority was heavy industry, as had been the case during the industrialisation drive in the Soviet Union. There was a sensible sounding argument for this. Once the basic industries – such as steel – had been built, so it was believed, they could be used to build up the backward sectors of the economy such as agriculture. That meant that consumption might not rise as rapidly as promised, but the prospect was of a dramatic rise some time in the future.

In effect, this meant sacrificing workers' living standards for distant – and as it turned out largely illusory – benefits. Had there been a channel for people to express their feelings on major policy issues, such as genuine trade unions, then it is hard to believe that such a policy could have been implemented. Its immediate consequence was a chronic and worsening imbalance in the consumer goods market characterised by an enormous excess of demand over supply. The situation was particularly serious for food, and deliveries even of such basics as bread became irregular in many parts of the country.

This was the consequence of the direction of resources into investment projects that could not yield returns for several years: the main ones were expected to take six or seven years to complete. Meanwhile, people were coming from villages, finding work in new industries and earning money, but the consumer goods they wanted to buy were not yet being produced. Major expansion in that sector would only come when the investment projects in heavy industry had been completed and then used to modernise consumer goods industries and agriculture.

In fact, some consumer goods sectors were declining and it was quite clear that hopes for a big improvement in agriculture, based on the alleged benefits of collectivisation, were totally unrealistic.

Marxists had frequently assumed that large farms would tend to be more productive, just as large factories in industry tended to be better. It is certainly clear that the tiny scattered strips, still predominant in much of Poland, are incompatible with modern technology. They are too small to allow the best use of tractors and combine harvesters.

Nevertheless, there are real disadvantages to very large farms. It is impossible to supervise farm work closely, while employees cannot be

expected to retain the phenomenal level of motivation of the individual peasant. One problem in Poland was said to be that some members of the new collective farms expected to work only a forty hour week!<sup>11</sup>

This would be possible only at a *very* high level of technology. Poland even today is still in the early stages of mechanising agriculture. Moreover, it is not clear that very large units are the only way. A lot of modern agriculture still requires very few people to operate it, but it does require a large amount of investment. Battery hens, piggeries and also a great deal of mechanisation are quite compatible with the family farm, which remains the typical form in much of Western agriculture, provided it has adequate resources.

There may be other advantages to collectivisation. It could then be possible for people to work shifts, take holidays and give each other free time. That was still not a realistic possibility in the 1950s. Nevertheless, it was still quite wrongly believed that collectivisation could *immediately* lead to higher output. The argument for this was derived from Stalin's false dictum that private agriculture was a breeding ground for capitalists who in turn were actively sabotaging the development of the socialist economy.

This was the rationale for an extremely unpopular policy of trying to cajole peasants to join cooperatives, but only 6% did and most of them were in the newly settled areas. State farms accounted for only about 10% of production in the mid-1950s so that Polish agriculture remained overwhelmingly private. Moreover, the disastrous economic consequences are clear from figures showing that output per worker and per hectare was significantly lower on the cooperative farms than on the small private farms in the same areas. Far from solving any problems, the attempt to collectivise agriculture, and the deliberate starvation of resources to private farms which was one of the forms of pressure used, only worsened the shortages.

This serious economic imbalance was typical in Eastern Europe in the last years of Stalin's life and more recently too. It is obviously quite different from the difficulties of capitalist economies that lead to crises with depression and unemployment. They typically involve *inadequate* demand so that private firms no longer find it profitable to employ as many people. The socialist countries were suffering from the opposite problem with unemployment, the scourge of Poland's villages before the war, disappearing alongside growing shortages of consumer goods and of industrial inputs.

The government took various corrective measures including the temporary reintroduction of rationing in 1951 and then an

approximate doubling in the price of food in 1953. That, however, meant that prices were definitely rising faster than wages, and discontent was visibly growing, albeit less rapidly than elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The party leadership therefore concluded in October that there had to be a shift in emphasis towards consumer goods to ensure an immediate increase in living standards. That meant delaying some of the investment projects.

In fact, even many of the priority projects were encountering difficulties. It seems that, even if it were possible to turn a blind eye to the immediate effect on living standards, it would still have been wrong to aim for so high a level of investment. It ultimately led to a slower rate of growth for the economy as a whole and to an enormous waste of material and human resources.

The problem was analysed in the late 1950s by Michal Kalecki, the most prominent Polish economist. He concluded that growth had been held in check by a number of 'barriers'.<sup>12</sup> In particular, these were the limited scope for imports, the shortage of a number of raw materials and the shortage of trained personnel in the construction industry. As a result a number of major investment projects remained half finished or unusable. This had catastrophic repercussions throughout industry as the output from these new projects had been counted on for other parts of the economy. A lower level of investment would therefore have avoided a great deal of this waste of resources and thereby have enabled the economy to grow more rapidly.

As will be argued in Chapter 4, this only partly explains the problem that came to be associated with 'over-investment', i.e. with trying to achieve a faster rate of growth than was possible. Nevertheless, the striking facts were that the Six Year Plan ended with many workers feeling themselves worse off than before, with a mass of ambitious projects still far from completion and with a rise in industrial output that was largely achieved by expanding employment in *existing* factories. When compared with the dreams of phenomenal economic progress that the regime had encouraged, it was a shattering disappointment which had a powerful influence on the deepening crisis of confidence in the regime during the turbulent events following the death of Stalin.

#### *The collapse of the monolith*

Even before the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956, Stalin's

death led to changes. The power of the security forces was dramatically reduced and a number of prisoners released. Gomulka was among them but there was still no suggestion that the condemnation of his political line had been wrong. Press control was less strict and some awkward topics could be discussed. There was, of course, still no direct criticism of the regime.

In 1955 the prestige of the leadership was further threatened when the old Polish Communist Party was quietly rehabilitated. Another blow was Khrushchev's restoration of relations with Yugoslavia in 1955. It was only a short step to recognise that different countries could pursue their own roads to socialism. That obviously suggested that the condemnation of Gomulka had been unjustified.

There were fierce arguments within the leadership and talk of the need for 'democratisation', but there were no decisive changes. Then, in February 1956 at the CPSU Twentieth Congress, Khrushchev launched his attack on Stalin. His secret speech, in which he indicated some of Stalin's crimes, was read out to party meetings in Poland. It initiated an active campaign against the effects of the 'cult of the personality', the euphemism for Stalin's worst ideas and practices. Possibly Khrushchev did this so as to win wider support in his struggle against a group who wanted to continue with many of Stalin's policies.

In any event, the effect on the Polish party was shattering. Almost immediately after hearing the revelations Bierut, who had been General Secretary since he replaced Gomulka in 1948, died from a heart attack. Throughout the following months the party leadership was in confusion. It was unable to prevent dramatic moves towards liberalisation which had been encouraged for some time by the youth union's weekly *Po Prostu* which inspired the emergence of discussion clubs throughout the country. In March they formed their own central body, the Centre of Clubs of Young Intellectuals. That was just one indication of the atmosphere that was leading towards demands for a fundamental change in the country's political life.

Meanwhile, the Cominform was dissolved and the right of different countries to pursue their own roads to socialism firmly re-established. There was also a fully public rehabilitation of the old Communist Party. This was the subject of a Central Committee resolution demanding a serious investigation of the party's history. It was also the subject of bitter comment among masses of disoriented party members. The cryptic pronouncement at the time that the old party's dissolution had been 'based on materials which were falsified by

subsequently exposed provocateurs' was hardly satisfactory. The 'provocateurs' were never named, arousing suspicions of another Soviet attempt to cover up for a horrific crime.

At the end of April parliament approved an amnesty leading to the release of 40,000 prisoners, many of whom had fought in the domestic resistance during the war. This was a welcome measure, but it was certainly not enough to restore faith in the regime. That was made abundantly clear when the situation was transformed by the working class.

The most dramatic event was 'Black Thursday', 28 June, in Poznan. Workers in the Cegielski works, which was Poland's largest factory with 15,000 employees making railway equipment, staged a strike and marched onto the streets. They were joined by workers from other factories and a massive demonstration took place on the final day of an international trade fair. It ended in street battles between the army and armed men. It was admitted at the time that 53 people had been killed, but a recent investigation produced a still incomplete list of 75 deaths.<sup>13</sup>

There are still a lot of unanswered questions about this crucial event in Poland's post-war history. It was not seriously investigated at the time. In fact, the strike leaders were quietly moved away to other places of work in the years after 1956. Only in 1981 could they say openly exactly what happened.

There is greatest clarity on the initial sources of discontent. As Ochab, the party First Secretary at the time, admitted, a 25% increase in productivity had been achieved since 1953 which 'was not properly reflected in the rise of wages'. In fact, in the second half of 1955 earnings for about 75% of workers actually declined due to changes in piece rate norms.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly there were rumblings of discontent starting in 1953. In the new atmosphere following the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, groups of workers began pressing their complaints more vigorously. The management, the party and the official trade union hierarchy paid little attention, but the chairman of the local trade union body agreed to call an open union meeting.<sup>15</sup> It ended with the election of a delegation which went to Warsaw to negotiate with the government. It returned in an optimistic mood with a provisional agreement and an understanding that the minister with ultimate responsibility for their industry would come to explain the situation to a mass meeting. When he failed to appear, the workers marched onto the streets. As Ochab later put it, 'an important role was played by the callousness and bureaucratism of the authorities,

both central and local'.

It does seem that a group of Cegielski workers had contacts with other factories where workers were just as bitter about the failure of living standards to rise. It was therefore no surprise to them when the rest of Poznan's industry joined the strike. The demonstration was remarkably well disciplined. Banners appeared with the slogan 'Bread and Freedom' and there was even a loudspeaker-van warning people 'not to step on the grass'.

There is, however, no reason to suppose that the initial strike leaders were responsible for what happened next. A crowd estimated by many at 200,000 gathered in the main square demanding to see the Prime Minister. For reasons that are still unclear, no message came from Warsaw to say that he was coming, and he ultimately arrived too late to avert the tragedy.

After spending some hours singing religious and patriotic songs, the demonstrators began to get nervous and a false rumour spread that the workers' delegation had been arrested. A small group responded to this by breaking into the prison where they seized 76 rifles and an enormous amount of ammunition. Shortly afterwards an order was given – to this day nobody has admitted responsibility or explained the exact reason for it – for the police to fire at civilians. Some of the demonstrators responded by fighting pitched battles with petrol bombs and barricades in the streets. By the late afternoon tanks moved in, but that only heightened anger as rumours spread that the troops were Soviet. A provisional order was given to use artillery that night on one section of the town if serious resistance continued although there were probably never more than 120 civilians carrying guns.

The effect of this tragedy on the party leadership was to force a rapid reappraisal of its line, but the initial official response was pitifully inadequate. Cyrankiewicz, the Prime Minister, speaking on 29 June put the principal blame on 'murderous provocateurs' who had apparently 'taken advantage of unquestionably existing grievances ... caused by economic difficulties'.<sup>16</sup> That evaded the crucial question of why *he* had treated the workers with such contempt by ignoring their grievances before. The issue had become one of democracy as much as one of economics.

The Soviet response was even less understanding. In *Pravda*'s view the whole affair was a 'crude provocation' incited by 'imperialist and reactionary Polish underground agents'. The Soviet leadership's position was put even more forcefully by Bulganin and Zhukov, the

Soviet Prime Minister and Defence Minister, who visited Poland in the middle of a crucial Central Committee meeting at the end of July. They publicly accused the advocates of greater democracy of 'undermining the power of the people's democratic state' and they implied that the Polish press was giving scope for 'elements hostile to our cause'. Evidently, they thought the Poznan events should lead to a harder and less compromising line.

The majority of the Polish Central Committee implicitly rejected this. Their view was that, by implementing reforms, they could restore faith in the party. The meeting therefore adopted a resolution advocating a 'deepening of democratisation'. There were to be major economic changes, a new willingness to welcome criticism from below, a great reduction in the scope of the *nomenklatura* system and an end to discrimination against former members of the Home Army. There was also a fateful decision to restore Gomulka's party membership and to initiate talks with him at the highest level.

The resolution also emphasised that the fundamental error beforehand had been the failure 'to submit with the necessary speed a well-developed and constructive programme for overcoming the existing difficulties'. Unfortunately for them, that criticism was still fully justified. By no stretch of the imagination could their new policies overcome the shock of the Poznan events. There was, of course, absolutely no chance of forgetting what had happened on 28 June. People who had been arrested at the time came up for trial in September. A real effort was made by the authorities to ensure that the trials were visibly fair and the heaviest sentence, passed on 12 October, was only six years imprisonment for one of the group of nine men who took guns from the jail and used them against the police. All those not charged with murder or robbery were released soon afterwards.

During these months there was tremendous pressure for a dramatic change in line from the leadership. It had strong support within the Central Committee and was pushed hard by party branches and other mass organisations. One aspect, indicating the depth of disillusionment with old structures, was the decision in September of the party organisation in the Warsaw car factory to take the initiative in setting up a workers' council. The example was followed in other parts of the city.

The crucial central issue, however, was the demand for the reinstatement of Gomulka to the post of Party First Secretary. That was increasingly being presented as the way out of the 'serious

ideological and moral crisis'. It came to a head at a dramatic Central Committee meeting which began on 19 October but was interrupted the next day with the arrival of a Soviet delegation headed by Khrushchev. There was no doubting the strength of his message. Soviet troops, stationed in Poland since 1944, were mobilising from their bases. *Pravda* carried a powerful – and totally unjustified – piece accusing major articles in the Polish press of trying to provide a 'basis for the rejection of socialism'.

Neither, however, was there any doubt about the feelings of the mass of the Polish people. Some units of the military were put on a state of alert while the Warsaw party secretary called on workers to prepare themselves. Many stayed in their factories over night and there was talk of providing them with arms. On the following day meetings were held supporting the return of Gomulka and, after the departure of Khrushchev, he delivered the main report at the Central Committee. It amounted to a crushing condemnation of the Stalin period.

There was, he said, a dreadful legacy left behind by 'methods contrary to socialist humanism, to the socialist conception of the freedom of man, to the socialist conception of legality'. It was a period in which 'many people were submitted to bestial tortures. Terror and demoralisation were spread. On the soil of the cult of the personality, phenomena arose which violated and even nullified the most profound meaning of the people's power.'

He also felt that the July Central Committee meeting had been too mild in its condemnations of the disappointments of the Six Year Plan. As he pointed out, a lot of the advances in industry were questionable. Coal output had, it was true, risen by over 20%, but the great bulk of that increase was due to miners working overtime and missing out on rest days 'and this could not but ruin the health and strength of the miners'. This was one of the reasons why labour productivity was 36% below the 1938 level.

Investment policies also deserved stronger criticism. It was not just a problem of over-investment. A lot of the projects had been inadequately thought out and would never be completed. Moreover, there had been some borrowing to finance them and the loans obviously could not be repaid. As Gomulka pointed out, Poland was in the position of 'an insolvent bankrupt' thanks to the incompetence of 'those in charge of the national economy'.

Despite his strong criticisms of the past, Gomulka was cautious about ideas for economic reform which had been accepted by many of

his colleagues. He wanted to 'make haste slowly' and was not enthusiastic about ideas for self management. In this sense, his return to power was a step backwards. Before that, the leadership, lacking public confidence, had been yielding to new ideas such as those put forward at the Second Congress of Polish Economists in early June. Gomulka, partly because he could condemn past mistakes with so little equivocation, established enough prestige to be able to impose his own ideas.

This also showed in his ideas for political change. Blaming the Poznan events on 'imperialist agents and provocateurs' was in his view 'very naïve politically'. It seemed to him particularly absurd because, even at the time of great hardship and near civil war immediately after liberation, no agents and no underground organisation were able to make a breach in the ranks of the working class, to penetrate politically any section of the working class'. He therefore interpreted the events as just one part of an enormous movement demanding 'an explanation for the causes of evil'. The working class people, he claimed, simply 'wanted to know all the truth'.

Obviously, to make this possible there had to be a full investigation of how 'tragic events occurred when innocent people were sent to their death'. Gomulka was very powerful in condemning the crimes of the past. He did also specify the changes that would, in his view, satisfy the popular demand for democratisation. These included a bigger role for parliament and a new system for the elections that were due in December. All candidates would still be officially approved, but there would be more candidates than seats. This was an important, but not a fundamental change. There was still no scope for a legal opposition and the party was definitely to insist on retaining its 'leading role'. There was no guarantee of a permanent mechanism for the working people to control those in power.

This was therefore not an adequate basis for permanently solving Poland's problems, but it was enough to ensure tremendous popularity for Gomulka. He seemed to be leading the party to its greatest level of popularity ever. He spoke at mass rallies over the following days where hundreds of thousands participated. Speaking in Warsaw on 24 October he won applause for insisting on the need to follow 'consistently the path of democratisation' and, especially for reporting Khrushchev's assurance that 'within two days Soviet troops in Polish territory will return to their locations'. This part of his speech was not reported in the Soviet Union, but it was crucially important inside

Poland. Demands, which Gomulka opposed, were growing for a total withdrawal of all Soviet troops.

Relations with the Soviet Union certainly were tense. That was made clear when the Polish delegate to the United Nations actually abstained in a vote on a resolution critical of the Soviet Union in relation to the situation in Hungary. It was therefore very important that Gomulka went to Moscow in mid November and came back with an agreement that righted a number of injustices. There was an agreement on compensation for coal that had been 'sold' to the USSR at a ridiculously low price.

This significantly eased Poland's economic difficulties. There was also an agreement on 'the temporary stationing of Soviet troops' whereby it was specified that they would not interfere in Poland's internal affairs and that they were not to move from their bases without the agreement of the Polish government. It was also agreed that Polish citizens living in the USSR or held in Soviet prisons would be returned. About a quarter of a million came back.<sup>17</sup>

Gomulka could return as potentially one of Poland's national heroes. He could even consolidate his power with a general election that did allow some scope for choice. The release of Wyszynski and a new agreement with the church, restoring much of its autonomy, ensured that religious leaders gave broad support too. Nevertheless, Gomulka concluded the election campaign with the warning that failure to give him support could lead to 'crossing Poland off the map of European states'. He wanted an independent country, but he believed that to be possible only with Soviet support. In the event, only one PUWP candidate failed to get elected.

## NOTES

1. *Rudé Právo*, 26 September 1946. See also M. Myant, *Socialism and Democracy in Czechoslovakia 1945-1948* (Cambridge, 1981), esp. p.138.
2. A. Jezierski and B. Petz, *Historia gospodarcza Polski Ludowej 1944-1975* (Warsaw, 1980), p.98.
3. Slabek, op. cit., pp.220-1.
4. These were given in the weekly paper of the Cominform, *For a Lasting Peace for a People's Democracy*, 15 September 1948.
5. A.I. Sobolev, *People's Democracy, a New Form of Political Organisation of Society* (Moscow, 1954).
6. Evidence that the establishment of one-party rule was the key factor in creating scope for these practices is even clearer in the case of Czechoslovakia; see Myant, op. cit., esp. pp.235-7.

7. This statistical evidence is given in A. Piekarski, *Freedom of Conscience and Religion in Poland* (Warsaw, 1979).
8. For a fuller account of the views of Marx and Lenin on democracy see M. Johnstone, 'Socialism, democracy and the one-party state', *Marxism Today*, August/September/October, 1970.
9. Jezierski and Petz, op. cit., p.153.
10. B. Bierut and H. Minc, *The Polish Nation in the Struggle for Peace and the 6-year Plan* (Krakow, 1951), p.103.
11. J. Dunman, *Agriculture: Capitalist and Socialist* (London, 1975), p.170.
12. M. Kalecki, *Introduction to the Theory of Growth in a Socialist Economy* (Oxford, 1969), p.46.
13. J. Maciejewski, *Polityka*, 6 June 1981.
14. P.E. Zinner (ed.), *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe* (New York, 1956), p.132.
15. S. Matyja, *Polityka*, 30 May 1981.
16. Zinner, op. cit., p.131. The quotes in the rest of this section are from that book of documents.
17. Leslie *et al.*, op. cit., p.358.

## 3 Gomulka in Power

### *The reversal of democratisation*

Despite this promising start, the Gomulka period ended in a supreme irony. Having come to power on a wave of popular protest, he was finally ejected in a crisis following mass workers' protests. Large parts of his October speech could be thrown back in his face.

At first there was no denying a new atmosphere of freedom and a restoration of national pride. The media were given far more independence while cultural and academic life were much more lively. There was public discussion of policies and differences of opinion were expressed in parliament.

Poland became a far more liberal country, but there was no fundamental transformation of the power structure. The party was still able to retain its 'leading role', meaning its control over other organisations through the *nomenklatura* system and the suppression of all criticism of its position in society and of its leading figures. Within the party power was still concentrated at the top. After his fall from power in 1970 Gomulka was criticised for forming an inner leadership that could ensure that he always had his way in the Political Bureau. Unanimous decisions were then presented to the Central Committee which once more ceased to be a forum for discussion and became a rubber stamp for Gomulka's policies. According to Cyrankiewicz, the Prime Minister under Gomulka, nobody was in a position to propose alternative policies or challenge the party leader, 'from the Political Bureau downwards'.<sup>1</sup>

He may, of course, have been exaggerating to defend himself after Gomulka's fall. Nevertheless, there was certainly no mechanism to compel those in power to listen to voices from below. Gradually, the authoritarian power structure was built up again. It operated without terror from a secret police force, but it still generated very similar antipathies.

The beginnings of this degeneration were already visible in 1957. The 'retreat from October', albeit a piecemeal and gradual retreat, started with the banning of *Po prostu*, which had become a platform

for advocates of taking democratisation further by, for example, giving much greater powers to workers' councils. It had a reputation for unmasking cases of corruption and incompetence as its reporters 'roamed the country striking fear and hatred in the local officials'.<sup>2</sup>

Students staged demonstrations in support of the journal, but they were violently suppressed. Gomulka was already sacrificing the support of the radical intellectuals.

Relations with the church also deteriorated – although there was never a return to the extremes of mutual hostility of the Stalin period – following renewed accusations that priests were spreading anti-Communist propaganda. There were various repressive measures in retaliation, including the refusal of permission to build churches in new housing schemes. In 1961 religious education, which had been made optional in 1956 when the regime needed the church's support most, was eliminated in schools.

The meaning of the new line was made clear at the PUWP's Third Congress which, despite strong pressure from within the party, was delayed until March 1959. Gomulka's speech contained none of the harsh condemnations of Stalinism. Apparently the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU had 'condemned and eliminated the faults and distortions linked with the cult of the personality'.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to reconcile that claim with the hard fight Gomulka had in 1956 against Soviet interference in Poland's affairs.

The 'main enemy' was said to be 'revisionism' which had an 'objective link with the aims of antisocialist, bourgeois social forces'. He did not make any effort to debate with these 'revisionists' – the congress had been delayed for so long that there had already been a purge of the party's ranks – or to give a fair representation of their views. He did, however, accuse them of 'weakening the power of the dictatorship of the proletariat' and demanding 'a free play of social forces'. By way of contrast, he insisted that, as when taking power in 1944, the principle had to be 'democracy for the working people, for the advocates of socialism', but 'no freedom for the enemies of freedom'. Apparently those people he condemned as 'revisionists' were enemies of freedom. He gave them no chance to reply.

Several explanations have been offered for this gradual return to harsher policies. One possibility is that Gomulka was frightened by events in Hungary where a reform movement seemed to culminate in the sudden and dramatic collapse of Communist power. He may also have been determined to achieve a full reconciliation with the Soviet leaders. By 1956 West Germany had emerged as a powerful country

which refused to accept the Oder-Neisse Line. There were always fears among Poles that another deal could be done between the Soviet Union and Germany at their expense.

There are, however, two other reasons that were probably more important. The first is that, contrary to the image that had been created during his imprisonment and during his firm line in 1956, Gomulka was not an enthusiastic advocate of democratisation. He was in fact a very stubborn man who clung firmly to much of his thinking of the 1944-8 period. The 'retreat from October' therefore involved the elimination of those changes which had been conceded when the regime was too weak to resist but which did not find a place in Gomulka's political thinking.

The second point was that, having prevented a radical transformation of the power structure, Gomulka was then in a position to behave as an arbitrary dictator. No opposition movement was allowed which could have protected radical journals that might offend the authorities. Greater liberalism meant that more ideas could be expressed, but Gomulka was under no obligation to listen. As the years went by he acquired a reputation for stubborn and distrustful arrogance. There were frequent rumours of him flying into a rage when presented with criticisms or uncomfortable facts.

In the late 1960s he was firmly entrenched as First Secretary and the early liberalism of his regime had definitely gone. In fact Kuron and Modzelewski, two lecturers at Warsaw University, were sentenced to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years imprisonment in 1967 for circulating an 'open letter'<sup>3a</sup> which characterised the 'central political bureaucracy' as a 'ruling class' and argued that it would be overthrown in a 'proletarian revolution'. That sort of analysis is referred to in Chapter 4 where it is rejected. That, however, is very different from the Polish authorities' view that Kuron and Modzelewski were endangering the socialist order of society. Continual suppression of discussion and criticism itself created far greater dangers.

The issue of intellectual and cultural freedom came to a head in early 1968 when the authorities closed down the showing of a classical Polish play in the National Theatre. The reason was the response of the youthful audience to various anti-tsarist and anti-authoritarian passages which was interpreted as an anti Soviet demonstration.

This caused offence not just as an arbitrary use of power, but because it raised in an immediate and dramatic form the festering issue of the regime's readiness to suppress a fundamental part of Poland's national and cultural heritage so as to avoid offending the

Soviet leaders. It seemed then, as was said later in relation to the censorship of a film, that 'a Russian uniform – even a tsarist one – has no place summoning up unfriendly associations'.<sup>4</sup>

Confronted with this extraordinary attack on cultural freedom, a group of Warsaw students staged a street demonstration in protest. Its organisers were arrested and a subsequent protest meeting was brutally attacked by the police with the approval of the university authorities. Demonstrations spread throughout Poland's universities, but they were met with the same brutal police repression. The movement was weak from the start as, despite undeniable discontent among the working class, it remained tied to cultural and academic issues and did not inspire active sympathy from the rest of the population. By the end 1,200 students had been arrested. A few of these were tried and sentenced to terms of imprisonment. Many more were expelled from their places of study. With them went a number of prominent academics who were accused of instigating the protests. Their dismissal was totally illegal as the government simply did not have the power to decide over professorial appointments.

In the following years close police surveillance of students became a standard practice. There always seemed to be a group of men 'repainting' the gates at Warsaw University and watching everyone who passed through.

More immediately, the political crisis of 1968 took a new and ugly turn when condemnations of 'revisionist' academics were combined with a hunt for 'Zionist' influences in the party leadership. This rapidly developed into a major campaign which, despite official claims to the contrary, was felt by many of the 25-30,000 people of Jewish origin who still remained in Poland to be directed against them. It has been estimated that about two thirds of them left the country as a result.

The facts that the 'anti-Zionists' could pick on were the genuine doubts of many Jews over the government's policy of severing diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967, and the discovery that several of the arrested demonstrators had parents in high positions. From that some far-fetched conclusions were drawn. Kazimierz Kakol concluded that 'a conspiratorial group connected with the Zionist centre was trying to bring about an increase of demonstrations and street clashes ... We were faced with an attempt at ... – I believe this is the proper phrase – a *coup d'état*'.<sup>5</sup>

Andrzej Werblan, a leading party ideologist, argued at the Central Committee meeting in July 1968 that the main danger was from 'revisionists' who had allegedly established a 'monopoly' in scientific

life. A particular target was Adam Schaff who had written a book in 1967 relating Marx's theory of alienation to what Werblan described as the 'false political theory of the deepening alienation of our state from society'.<sup>6</sup> This work had already been criticised within the party before, although its central message – that the theory of alienation is still relevant to Polish society – is hardly open to question today. Nevertheless Schaff, who was of Jewish origin and had been the party's leading expert on philosophy and the social sciences for many years, was accused of failing to support party policy in March and removed from the Central Committee.

Werblan did not relate the roots of the conflicts directly to Jews but, in a major article in the literary monthly, he argued that their strong presence in the pre-war Communist Party had strengthened 'cosmopolitan' attitudes and made it much harder to appreciate the significance of the national question. He accused leading Jewish party members of favouring Jews in the party apparatus.<sup>7</sup> The implication was to justify the idea of 'ethnic regulation of party cadres' which amounted to a compromise with lingering anti-Jewish prejudices of part of the population and had been advocated some years before. In practice it was actually taking place.

The real instigator, however, was said to be the powerful Minister of the Interior Mieczyslaw Moczar. He had a power base among the so called partisans, the former participants in the Communist resistance. Although they obviously could not form a faction within the party with their own distinctive policies, they did have some interests and ideas in common. They were hostile to 'revisionism' and, so it was claimed, to the older party leaders, many of Jewish origin, who had spent the war in the Soviet Union and were blocking their promotion into top positions.

Gomulka generally was a restraining influence, insisting that the great majority of people of Jewish origin had given outstanding service to post-war Poland. Nevertheless, the net effect was to harm the country's reputation throughout the world while simultaneously silencing a section of the intellectual community most closely associated with ideas of reform. It was one more step on the road to a still more autocratic style of rule that was soon to culminate in Gomulka's downfall.

#### *The failure of economic reforms*

Gomulka's thinking on the economy, as in other fields, contained no

new ideas. He was forced into a reappraisal of agricultural policy when, after October 1956, most of the existing co-operatives were spontaneously dissolved. He still talked of the desirability of a socialist transformation of agriculture but very little could be done when the technological level was still so low and when the peasants themselves were so clearly uninterested. The party leadership therefore had to accept small, private farms as a fact of life. They were, however, closely tied to the planned economy by compulsory delivery quotas and prices were set by the state. Cooperation in the beginnings of mechanisation was made possible by the revival of 'peasant circles' which have been likened to farmers' co-operatives in capitalist countries.

The result was a slow growth in agricultural output. The compulsory purchase prices were set at a low level. Peasants' incomes therefore remained relatively low and grew more slowly than those of workers. Moreover, investment was still inadequate to provide the basis for a really modern agriculture. In the late 1960s as we shall see, Gomulka even adopted a policy which served to *discourage* growth in agriculture.

Despite the seriousness of the agricultural problem, most of the discussion among economists after the Six-Year Plan centred on industry. Although there were still serious difficulties in 1956, the longer-term prospects were fairly good. The policy over the next few years was aimed at restoring balance in the economy. This was helped by the completion, albeit a few years behind schedule, of the investment projects begun in the early 1950s. Taken as a whole, the nine year period up to 1958 had seen great advances. Poland had a strong base in heavy industry and had built up from scratch a range of industries producing such goods as televisions, refrigerators, washing machines and motor-cycles.

It still had a long way to go to reach the level of the most advanced countries but industrial output was still growing at about 10% per year in the late 1950s. The conclusion seemed to be that, if the country could stick to realistic targets, then socialism did provide the potential for rapid and harmonious growth.

As the past mistakes were so clearly linked to the autocratic method of taking decisions, it is not surprising that there was pressure for greater participation in formulation of economic policy. In response to this, shortly before Gomulka came to power, an Economic Council was created. It was a body composed of economic experts with a broad mandate to advise the government on economic policy, to make evaluations of the situation and to work out proposals

on specific problems and on forms of management of the economy.

This was only one of the bodies enabling more thorough discussion of, and hence wider participation in, economic decisions. Its demise did not indicate that it had nothing to contribute. On the contrary it stemmed from its determination to make independent evaluations which conflicted with the autocratic style of government that was gradually restored under Gomulka. After a few years it ceased to exist when, in contravention of a resolution from parliament, the Prime Minister simply omitted to reappoint its members.<sup>7</sup> Its credibility had already been dented, paradoxically, by signs of strain in the economy in 1959. No sooner had balance been restored than the government began another investment drive. Gomulka preferred to put the blame for the resulting difficulties on advisers rather than on himself. He was already consolidating his power and ignoring the lessons of past mistakes. He was similarly half hearted in implementing ideas for reform of the methods of economic management.

These related to the belief that the problem was *not* simply one of over-investment. If shortages appeared in supplies of labour and materials that was partly because of their excessive and wasteful use throughout the economy. The solution could therefore be, at least in part, greater efficiency in individual enterprises.

The argument, which emerged throughout Eastern Europe shortly after Stalin's death, was that over-centralised planning was leading to inefficiency and waste. The system worked, to put it very simply, by central planners giving detailed instructions to individual enterprises. They were allocated a set amount of inputs and required to reach a set output target. Financial rewards for management were tied to plan fulfilment.

This highly bureaucratic system led to a number of well-publicised problems. There was no need for managers to worry about the usefulness of their products. As long as they were reaching the plan target they were paid their bonuses. It was up to the central planners to ensure that every enterprise was producing what was needed. The best known problems arose from instructions that were ambiguous. An enterprise instructed to produce a certain number of nails would take the easy road of concentrating on smaller ones. If it was asked to produce so many tons of nails, it would concentrate on the bigger ones thereby fulfilling the plan target in the easiest possible way.

This problem is so well known that jokes about a factory fulfilling a plan target with one enormous nail have become part of Eastern European folklore.

The only way to avoid this, without completely changing the system, would be still more centralisation. The centre must specify exactly how many of which types of nails must be produced. It would be impossibly difficult to plan a whole economy in such minute detail. The attempt to do so is bound to lead to wasteful mistakes with too much of one thing produced alongside particularly severe shortages of something else.

Another problem was the lack of incentive at the level of the enterprise to introduce new products or to improve the technology for making existing ones. An innovation that works will be met with a higher plan target for the next period: the enterprise therefore gains nothing. An attempted innovation that fails could lead to lower output and will be heavily penalised. Moreover, there is no continual threat from competitors, as under capitalism, driving enterprises to seek innovations. The system therefore rewards most highly conservative and unimaginative management.

These problems, and many more, led to suggestions for economic reforms. At first the ideas were based on the visible failings of the existing planning system. After 1955 they could be combined with a degree of admiration for the Yugoslav economic system in which the highly centralised model of planning had been abandoned in favour of a market mechanism.

In Poland, however, few went that far. Proposals in the late 1950s usually contained three distinct elements. The first was a reduction of the workload on the central planners by giving enterprises greater freedom: they were to be freed from the detailed plan targets and left to determine their production on the basis of what their customers wanted. The second was a reduction in the number of success indicators. Managers had been presented not only with output targets but also with increasing numbers of targets to encourage, for example, conservation of materials or increases in productivity. These, of course, were attempts to overcome faults that were appearing in the system. The effect, however, was an enormous and incomprehensible array of bonuses relating to many different criteria. One common suggestion was that these should be replaced with just one indicator, profit.<sup>8</sup>

The third element was that pay for managers and possibly also employees should not be linked to a plan target. It should instead be linked to the economic results of the enterprise. This would mean that there is an incentive to produce what customers want and to try to find cheaper and more efficient ways of producing it.

It was frequently emphasised that the aim was *not* to follow the Yugoslav example or to abandon central planning in total. In fact, it was often argued that central planning would be *strengthened*. Freed from the need to devote all their time to detailed, operational decisions, central planners could make a better effort at planning the general development of the economy. Continued direct control over major investment decisions and a small number of key sectors would give them the means to achieve this.

In practice all of the socialist countries have made some moves towards economic reform. Only Hungary, however, has made a serious effort at combining central planning with the market mechanism with a reform implemented in 1968 and subsequently modified on a number of occasions. In Poland, despite a number of beginnings, a full economic reform of this sort has never been implemented. Its advocates give a number of both political and economic reasons for this.

One is the opposition of the officials involved in the existing method of central planning. They are notoriously sceptical of the benefits of reducing their own power so that, when entrusted with implementing an economic reform, they are likely to find any pretext available to delay and sabotage it. Furthermore, they could expect support from sections of the political leadership. Gomulka himself was never fully convinced by the 'reformers'. He viewed with suspicion those who advocated major change in the economic system, as they tended often to be advocates of political reform.

The leadership's reluctance was reinforced by the undeniable fact that there *are* difficulties in implementing economic reforms and these are particularly great if the economy is already out of balance. In fact, one of the principal reasons for economic over-centralisation was the appearance of shortages. If a vital input or raw material is in short supply, then the central planners must try to control its allocation. As shortages affect ever more goods, so their task becomes more important and more difficult. To decentralise under conditions of general scarcity could only lead to chaos.

This suggests that if all is well, then the leadership may feel no need to listen to proposals for change. If, on the other hand, they are confronted with an economic crisis, then reforms offer no solution. Moreover, reforms involve potentially unpopular measures.

The most obvious for Poland is the need for price adjustments. The point is that the prices of a number of goods are held down below the cost of production. These include basic foods and children's clothes.

Their production may be unprofitable for individual enterprises, but they are still produced. An enterprise is *instructed*, as part of its plan target, to produce a set quantity of children's shoes. Obviously, if enterprises were given greater freedom and guided by the profit motive, then children's shoes would not be produced at the existing prices. The solution often advocated is to bring all prices into line with costs of production and compensate people by raising family allowances and the lowest incomes. As we shall see, this has not been easy in Poland.

It must also be re-emphasised that the question of comprehensive economic reform is only one part of the problem and may not be the most important. It would not be plausible to blame all of Poland's problems onto a system that has done better in neighbouring countries. Hungary's experience certainly proves that a reformed system can work reasonably well, but it is difficult to know how much of the economic progress they have made could have been achieved by modifications to the old system. With some degree of decentralisation, careful choice of success indicators and broad balance in the economy, it may be possible to achieve fairly rapid and steady growth.

This last point is crucial. Over-investment, leading to widespread shortages, is bound to cause serious difficulties. The quality of products typically falls as enterprises learn that anything they produce has to be accepted. Customers are in no position to complain about quality when they are thankful to get anything at all.

Moreover, shortages lead to long delays in completing investment projects. This was particularly obvious in 1953, 1959, 1962 and 1968. In all those years projects had to be postponed for lack of resources. Even at other times, there have been hold ups in construction and in getting regular supplies for new factories to start operating. A long investment cycle has therefore been pinpointed as one of the principal failings in the Polish economy.<sup>9</sup> It may even be a major contributory factor to the notorious technological backwardness of the socialist economies in all except priority sectors. One study in the Soviet Union, where the problem is very similar, showed that the construction period alone was taking four times as long as in the West. As a result, equipment was often obsolete before it was in operation.<sup>9a</sup>

It remains an open question how much of the 'technological gap' can be blamed on the lack of incentives to innovate inside enterprises, how much on rigidities in the overcentralised planning system – which

makes it extremely difficult to adapt to change — and how much is a simple consequence of this overstrain on the economy due to persistent attempts to complete too many projects at once. In practice, it is impossible to separate the effects of these persistent failings in the economies of Eastern Europe.

#### *The same economic mistake again*

Having headed off pressure for major economic reforms after 1956, Gomulka could preside over a period of rising living standards. There were problems, but the economy grew reasonably steadily and industrial development was spread into previously backward parts of the country. The conclusion in later years was that nothing particularly bad happened, but neither was anything particularly good achieved.

That judgement led to a search for a new and ambitious way forward and there was mounting pressure from some prominent economists for a new investment drive. By the mid-1960s it seemed that this was a necessity if jobs were to be created for the post-war generation that was beginning to come onto the labour market. It was, however, accepted that the mistakes of the Six-Year Plan would not be repeated.

The most significant change from the past was that the investment drive was to be *selective*. It had been noted that a number of countries with weaker raw material bases were able to achieve very high growth rates; Japan, Italy and the GDR were obvious examples. The key to their success seemed to be concentration on sectors of manufacturing industry with a rapidly expanding demand around the world. Poland, however, was strong in coal, steel and certain sectors of the heavy engineering industry.

It was very backward, and that meant ten or fifteen years behind capitalist countries at an otherwise comparable level of development, in modern and high technology consumer goods. Instead, higher living standards in Poland had meant to a very great extent high food consumption and, in particular, relatively high levels for *meat*. The table below illustrates this, although figures are not strictly comparable and *overestimate* Poland's meat consumption relative to Britain's.

TABLE 2

Annual meat consumption in kilograms per head for selected countries.<sup>10</sup>

	1933-7	1950	1960	1969	1979
Poland	17	37	44	53	73
Italy	20	15	27	47	72
USA	72	82	94	109	118
Great Britain	68	50	71	75	74

This may seem surprising in view of the repeated reports of meat shortages. That, however, is due not so much to an *absolute* shortage as to the continual situation of excess demand and to the absence of modern consumer goods that could attract Poles away from their carnivorous habits.

The full strategy that emerged involved a concentration on the electrical, electronic and chemical industries. Agriculture, the output of which had grown slowly beforehand, was definitely not viewed as a priority. The objective, in fact, was to aid the strategy of 'selective growth' by encouraging a shift in consumption habits away from food.

This tied in with Gomulka's determination to avoid building up a debt. Imports of Western technology were therefore to be financed by a shift in Poland's foreign trade structure. Within this it was assumed that meat would still be exported, but the grain to feed the animals was to be produced entirely inside the country. Excluding extraordinarily good luck in agriculture, that effectively meant that supplies for domestic consumption would have to be reduced. Once again, growth was to be at the expense of the working people.

Michał Kalecki took the opportunity of a pre-congress discussion to criticise these ideas as totally unrealistic. He even proposed adjustments to the plan that would allow for higher consumption. His ideas were ridiculed and he was removed from his post as adviser in the Planning Commission. At no time did the party leadership allow public discussion of his criticisms. From then on the government was content to turn a totally deaf ear to all alternative views on economic policy. Once again, over-ambitious economic policies were coming from an autocratic leadership that refused to listen to critics.

There were difficulties from the start, but the broad targets were

being reached up to 1968. Then, in 1969, there was a bad harvest. In the whole plan period agricultural production only rose by 9½% instead of the planned 17%. This meant that, in the last two years of the plan, imports were growing significantly faster than exports. Moreover, there were the clear symptoms of over-investment in industry. Growth was limited by shortages of skilled labour and of some raw materials.

Faced with these difficulties, the leadership could have decided to shift resources back to consumption. Instead, it continued with a high level of investment, maintained by taking resources away from the consumer goods industries, from improving social facilities and safety standards in factories, and from housing and community services. House building was frozen in 1970 while the average waiting time for a married couple wanting a flat had increased to seven years. These cutbacks also led to a slow down in the growth of employment and not all school-leavers could find jobs.

This inevitably led to rising discontent and growing imbalances in the consumer goods market. There had in fact been meat shortages from 1967 onwards and the situation worsened after the government's attempt to hold back the rise in fodder imports. The obvious solution, given that investment projects were sacrosanct, was to restore market equilibrium by price rises. The leadership therefore decided on the fateful step of a 40% increase in food prices just before Christmas 1970. This could also be given a spurious justification as part of the strategy for shifting consumption patterns. If that had been the intention, and if there had been modern consumer goods available, then the measure might have been acceptable to the public. In fact, it was an emergency measure aimed at enforcing a further cut in living standards. It came at a time when the government's credibility was already sinking thanks to the general austerity programme. It was even accompanied by a new incentive scheme which was to start operation in 1971. In effect it amounted to a wage freeze which was to last for at least two years.

The response at the time was a violent explosion of discontent. As Gierek insisted in later months, this had not been caused simply by price increases. It stemmed from failure of the Gomulka leadership to fulfill the essential objective of a socialist economy. This apparently was 'the endeavour for an ever better satisfaction of the needs of society'.

Even this cannot fully explain the events of December 1970. They indicated more than just an economic problem. Above all it needs to

be explained why the working class should have become the centre of opposition in what was claimed to be a workers' state.

*The end of inequality?*

By 1970 when Gomulka was overthrown, the issue of social inequalities had become a major source of discontent. It was, of course, already clear in 1956 that workers were a major driving force for opposition to the regime. This might seem surprising as there was no denying the improvement in the position of the working class in comparison with pre-war Poland. There had been dramatic changes in society partly as a consequence of the revolutionary transformation which eliminated the old ruling class and greatly reduced the privileges of the wealthiest section of the population. They were also partly due to the rapid industrialisation under socialism which created opportunities for people to find better jobs. There were places in industry for men who would previously have suffered from unemployment and lasting poverty in the countryside. There was work for women who before would have been tied to the home. Moreover, many of the new jobs required a high level of skill and training and were considerably more agreeable than the hard, unskilled labour that was so common in the past.

TABLE 3

Social structure of Poland's population<sup>11</sup>

	1931	1970
Capitalists, landlords, petty bourgeoisie	10.7	—
Workers	28.6	49.8
Peasants	51.8	25.1
Non-manual workers	5.5	22.4
Others	3.4	2.7
Total	100	100

The broad social changes are shown in Table 3. There were still small businessmen in 1970, but the number was very small and they are classified with the 'others'.

In terms of relative earnings workers had benefited a great deal from socialism. Kalecki made a comparison between their position relative to non-manual workers in 1937 and in 1960. Excluding from

the calculation domestic servants, who were quite a large group, non-manual workers earned on average over twice as much as manual workers before the war. In 1960 they were earning on average only 12% more. That dramatic change came about by a rise in living standards for workers accompanied by an actual decline for non-manual workers.<sup>12</sup>

Inequalities were certainly much smaller than before the war, but they did still exist. Table 4 shows the proportions of the working population receiving certain levels of income immediately after the Gomulka period. It refers to the socialist sector of the economy only which means nationalised and cooperative enterprises. It excludes private agriculture which covers a large part of the working population. On average farmers' living standards are reckoned to be lower than the average for the socialist sector, but there are a large number of employees who also work a little land. Many of the lowest paid workers are therefore better off than their official earnings suggest.

Also excluded are the small businessmen still working in handicrafts, catering and trade. It is impossible to make a serious estimate of their incomes. The levels they declare are often extremely low, meaning that they pay little tax. Their lifestyles often suggest that they are the very richest people in Polish society. Not surprisingly, a number of surveys have indicated that private businessmen do not enjoy much respect, but they do make a vital contribution to the economy filling lacunae in the bureaucratic planning system.

These figures do change a little from year to year. In the early 1960s, for example, 22% earned under 60% of the average. Generally, however, the picture has been pretty stable since the enormous

TABLE 4

Percentage of earnings in Poland relative to the average earnings in the early 1970s<sup>13</sup>

Under 60%	12½
60-80%	20½
80-120%	40
120-150%	17
150-200%	6
200-300%	3½
300-400%	½
Over 400%	0.1

upheavals of the early 1950s. In comparison with Britain, the picture is more egalitarian owing to the absence, in the Polish case, of a small but significant minority of very high earners. A comparison with Czechoslovakia – a socialist country with a more advanced economy – shows that inequalities in Poland are larger. There are more earning well over the average and considerably more receiving very low wages.

So Poland is still a country with a great deal of inequality. Figures on income alone may exaggerate its extent as certain basic goods are subsidised by the government and some are partly centrally allocated. Housing is the obvious example. Moreover, the pattern of income inequality is slightly different from Britain. Some manual workers, especially in construction, heavy industry and coal mining have very high earnings. Recently published figures for September 1980 show the Prime Minister and the party First Secretary with 'only' about five times the average. 8,410 people were earning over  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times the average. 3,600 of them were manual workers while the others included the very top government officials and directors of major industrial enterprises.<sup>14</sup>

The average for a miner is 1.7 times the average of all employees in industry meaning that he (and they are all men) is better paid than the average doctor and safely within the top 10% of all earners.

There is nothing exceptional in this. In other socialist countries too miners are well paid and earn more than managers in many other sectors of industry. There appears no longer to be a sharp division between the pay of professional people and manual workers. This, however, does not mean that manual work is any more highly esteemed. Surveys in Poland, and other socialist countries too, show that the population generally have far more respect for the most complex intellectual work. University professors and doctors come out at the top, even though they are not the best paid. Engineers and skilled workers do well, when compared with capitalist countries, but unskilled manual workers have a low prestige. Others who command little respect are policemen and private businessmen although they generally have high earnings.

This led the prominent sociologist Wesolowski to a very optimistic conclusion.<sup>15</sup> It is the accepted orthodoxy in Eastern Europe that the differences between manual and mental labour should slowly disappear as society evolves towards full communism. These results could suggest that this was already happening. Previously there had been a rigid social hierarchy. Those with the highest status also

enjoyed power and great wealth. By the 1960s, it seemed, there was no such obvious connection. The clearly defined structure inherited from capitalism was 'decomposing' and class differences were disappearing. Wesolowski could hope that, with further social development, the remnants of that hierarchy could disappear completely.

He *was* aware of social discontent. There is a strong feeling among some non-manual workers that they are undervalued. They would like a clearer differential as reward for their qualifications and generally speaking, the higher one's income, the less one favours the principle of equality. This, however, is weaker than the powerful egalitarian sentiments among the mass of the working class. One survey in 1961 suggested that the majority of skilled workers would like to see all differences disappear in the future. All this Wesolowski could interpret as part of the population looking back to the past while the workers were over-impatient to reach a fully communist society.

That was written in the 1960s. Subsequent events suggest that it was too optimistic a view. There is also a great deal more sociological evidence suggesting that the social structure is fairly well defined and that manual workers are more firmly towards the bottom. High pay for miners is certainly a deceptive indicator of their social standing. Contrary to some claims, it has not made them into a 'labour aristocracy', although they have generally had a reputation for loyalty to the regime. Their high earnings were, and are, necessitated by the difficulties in recruiting men in mining. There have been persistent manpower shortages from the very beginnings of economic planning and men had to be persuaded to come from other parts of the country to Silesia. Even without independent trade unions, some manual workers could claim a generous share in the rise in living standards. When other, more agreeable, jobs are available, the pay has to be high.

Steel workers are also well paid, but their job too is boring, unpleasant and dangerous. Detailed surveys of their attitudes in the 1960s showed that they did not regard themselves as privileged.<sup>16</sup> They made it clear that they wanted to be sure that their children would get an education leading to a more agreeable life in an office. Again, relatively high pay is a necessity to encourage people to work in this sector especially as it has expanded rapidly and therefore needed to recruit large numbers. It does not mean that the workers do not feel themselves to be in a subordinate position in society. In every industry, managers are better paid than manual workers. That applies

to miners as much as textile workers. The director of a large enterprise may well be paid over three times the average for all employees. On top of that he has more interesting work and a pleasanter life.

Wesolowski's argument also played down the significance of the large numbers of people whose incomes are very low. A recent estimate suggested that one seventh of the population was living on or below the poverty line. That means that they have only just enough to maintain some dignity in their life style. A lot of these would have been pensioners. In 1970 the average pension was 51% of average earnings. That, of course, is a great improvement on the pre-war period, but some pensions were much lower and those working outside the socialist sector did not qualify for the normal state pension.

The lowest paid workers are concentrated into education, health and distribution. Needless to say, large numbers of them are women. They could be said to have gained considerably from socialism as they had the opportunity to find full time work. By 1955 32% of working people were women and by the mid-1970s the figure was 42%. This must have been accompanied by a deep change in attitudes as 75% of the women at work in 1970 were married compared with only 20% in the 1930s.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, the assumption persists that women have a different role in life from men and they still definitely have the worse job opportunities. It is not even clear what the claim to have reached full employment means when a large proportion of women were still not working. They seem to have been regarded as a great reserve of labour power that could be mobilised when required.

The crucial point, of course, is the view that the woman is unsuited to certain kinds of employment and has the main responsibility for the home while the man is the principal bread winner. One consequence of this is that women are excluded, either by law or tradition, from the best paid manual jobs. That accentuates the labour shortage in mining, construction and heavy industry and compels the authorities to offer higher pay in those sectors. Meanwhile, women are concentrated into sectors of traditional women's work such as light industry, education and the health service. There is no need for high wages there as there have generally been plenty of women willing to work. It is quite normal practice today for a firm to advertise specifically for a woman or to staff an assembly line, quite deliberately, with nothing but young women.

The burden of housework also limits women's job opportunities. It is harder than in Britain owing to the lower level of mechanisation in

the home and, above all, to the poor availability of basic consumer goods. Queuing could take up a few hours every day. This is a serious handicap to women who might contemplate overtime or physically exhausting work which is usually better paid. It also means that those who attain high qualifications cannot rise to the top. There are plenty of women with higher education but, even in professions like medicine where the majority are women, top jobs typically go to men. This is partly because promotion often requires extra study and commitment which encroaches on one's free time. This is incompatible with heavy family commitments. It helps to reinforce the continuing assumption that women are just not suited for positions of authority.

Women therefore occupy a very important position in the workforce, but it is definitely a subordinate position. Up to now there has been no independent women's organisation to raise their grievances and the government has no reason to be concerned. Its job has been to ensure rapid economic growth, and that means enabling women to work when they are needed. If they end up with the worst jobs, then it seems that that is their own affair.

In many respects women in Poland are worse off than in neighbouring socialist countries. The work they do is pretty similar, but maternity rights and facilities for young children are relatively backward. The main reason for this may be that the birthrate in Poland has until recently remained high, while maternity grants in other countries were largely a deliberate incentive for people to have more children. Also, pre-school child care was improved in Czechoslovakia largely to enable women to stay at work because they had become essential to some sectors of the economy. That has been less true in Poland where there has often been a surplus of labour power.

Whatever the exact reasons, there has recently been strong pressure for the introduction of three years maternity leave. That, of course, would not fundamentally change women's position in society. It would simply make it easier for them to bear the double burden of working and raising children. In fact, the argument being raised in the 1970s was that women should not be prevented by financial pressures from devoting all their energies to caring for their young children. There has been no serious pressure for more radical changes.

Traditionally, of course, women have accepted their lot. Those with skills and training keep running important sectors like the health service. A lot also take routine administrative work and their low earnings help to pull down the average for non-manual workers as a

whole. Those with less training take poorly paid jobs in industry or services. In all cases, the work can be done for less pay than men would accept, although men could be said to suffer because the total income of a family unit is held down by the low earnings of the wife. That applies particularly to male *manual* workers whose wives tend to be in the very worst paid jobs. In fact, the main centres of discontent have tended to be predominantly male sectors of industry in which wages are quite good.

The shipyards on the Baltic coast were the obvious example in 1970. Large numbers of young men worked there. They may well have been much better off than their parents had been before, but investigations of their attitudes after December 1970 showed that they could see the differences within Polish society. They could see the lifestyle enjoyed by well paid office workers and by tourists who came from abroad and from other parts of Poland to stay in seaside hotels. They were also hit hard by the housing shortage. It is young people who have to live in sexually segregated hostels while they are waiting for flats to be built.<sup>18</sup>

It seems, then, that there is still a clearly defined social structure in Poland which provides an objective basis for working class discontent. Workers have gained enormously, but they tend to take for granted the gains of socialism. They assume that they will be able to get a permanent job. It is no comfort to be told that in the past this might have been impossible, or that in capitalist countries today it is by no means easy. They can see that they are not at the top of the social scale and they feel they have every right to ask for improvements. This is particularly true of the younger generation.

The feeling of young manual workers that they are under-valued may to some extent be *increased* by the possibilities for social advancement. Many of the agreeable, non-manual jobs have been filled by the children of workers. At first, this was a deliberate policy. In the early 1950s managers were recruited on the grounds of political loyalty and social origins. The result was a rapid drop in qualifications of directors of industrial enterprises. In 1945 84% had higher education, but by 1955 the figure was under 27%.<sup>19</sup>

After 1956 the approach shifted towards emphasis on formal education and by 1971 70% of directors had higher education. A good job was by then available only to those with the necessary qualifications, but there was still some bias towards the children of workers. There was conscious discrimination to help them gain access to colleges in the early period and again after 1968. In practice,

however, the majority of students have nearly always been from non-manual families.

Nevertheless, those who became managers in industry *are* overwhelmingly from working class backgrounds. The young workers can therefore see people from the same background as themselves enjoying positions of authority, an easier lifestyle with less strict discipline, a higher income and access to perks and bonuses allocated by the top management. This may create an incentive to seek further training but it can also cause resentment.

Wesolowski has therefore been criticised for missing the real nature of the divisions in Polish society. Income is certainly a less important source of social differences than under capitalism. Despite that, differences relating to education, type of work and life style have persisted. There seems to have been very little change in these, or for that matter in the pattern of income inequality, for a very long time.

Another frequent criticism is that he paid no attention to *power*. This may even make figures on inequalities of pay irrelevant when, as often happens, many goods are in short supply. The question then is who can get *access* to the scarce goods. Priority goes to those with the most power and that means, in the first place, the top political leaders.

It has been suggested by Mervyn Matthews that there is an 'elite' in all Eastern European countries composed roughly of those enjoying over three times the average income.<sup>20</sup> A tiny proportion of the population, possibly about 0.2% in the USSR, have no problems with housing, health services or goods in short supply. The censored media typically give no information at all about their actual earnings or the additional perks and privileges they may receive. A certain amount was published in Poland after Gomulka's rise to power in 1956 and he is said to have enjoyed a modest lifestyle. Nevertheless, certain privileges persisted and then grew rapidly under Gierek. Even in the 1960s, surveys of public opinion showed that top people were believed to be doing well, although private businessmen were more likely to be named as a privileged group.

Unpublished privileges for top people are only one aspect of corruption which is very widespread throughout society generally. It is often suggested that it is a traditional Polish way of life. This may have made it easier for people to slip into bad habits, but there are two more important explanations. One is the inevitable effects of chronic scarcities. Where there are queues there are always people who will try to bribe their way to the front. Those who can allocate scarce goods can expect to do well for themselves, and the butcher is often a

powerful figure.

The other explanation is that the power structure itself creates the maximum scope for corrupt practices at the top. As the official media are so strictly censored and as the police force are effectively controlled by party leaders, there is no danger of them being 'found out' in the formal sense. Nevertheless, the corrupt practices become widely known and that encourages a cynical attitude towards rules and regulations. Everyone, it seems, is 'on the take'.<sup>21</sup>

Some ordinary workers can do well too. If they can repair cars, televisions or household appliances they can supplement their earnings handsomely although, of course, they do have to work for it. Many, however, have little extra to offer. Obviously they have no scope to benefit from corruption.

This, of course, is only one aspect of the problem. Power may mean access to scarce goods or the ability to supplement one's income. More generally, it can mean a more interesting and rewarding life in which one can take decisions rather than just carrying out orders.

One of the promises of socialism, reiterated under Gomulka with the emergence of workers' councils, was that workers would have more power in the factories. As the next section shows, this was yet another field in which high hopes were followed by disappointment and disillusionment.

#### *Workers' power in the factories?*

In the Gomulka period there was an enormous amount of emphasis in Poland on the importance of their system of 'self management'.<sup>22</sup> This is apparently a means of breaking down the barrier between workers and managers. By involving the *whole* workforce in the problems of running their enterprise, it is apparently possible to 'liquidate' the sharp division between rulers and ruled in the labour process.

This is said to be impossible under capitalism. Private ownership of industry leads inevitably to conflicting interests between workers and management. Under socialism this should no longer be the case. Workers can get a more genuine sense of being the owners of the means of production. Even if manual work remains as boring as ever, they can acquire a greater sense of purpose from participating in decision making. This should also lead to better performance of the economy as there is the possibility of effective control over management by people who can spot mistakes quickly. There should also be benefits from encouraging workers to use their own initiative in

improving production processes. That is particularly important in view of the socialist economies' disappointing record in innovation and technical progress.

It has never been denied that there would be difficulties. Part of the job of self management is said to be teaching and educating, persuading workers to abandon the 'old' notions of class antagonism that developed under capitalism. Even allowing for that, there can be little doubt that the Polish self management system has never lived up to the expectations of those in power or of the workers themselves.

The beginnings of the system can be traced back to the 1940s. Works councils emerged in 1945 and held effective power in many factories. A decree in 1946 imposed limits on this but still left them with a fairly wide field of authority. Restrictions were felt to be necessary because, in view of the extreme economic difficulties at the time, there had to be more centralisation of the economy.

During the Six Year Plan there was far more rigid centralisation and concentration of power. It was made clear that one man, the director, had authority over decisions in an enterprise. He had absolute power, but he had little real freedom of manoeuvre as he also bore full responsibility to the planning authorities to ensure that plan targets were met. Trade unions were left with a limited role, concerned with some aspects of workers' welfare and, above all, with trying to stimulate greater work effort.

The director's power was restricted a little in 1954. As part of the changes that followed Stalin's death, the party organisation was given some authority to control the management. It was however not concerned with representing the employees' immediate interests. The party was expected to concern itself with the interests of the *whole* of society.

The real change came in 1956. After the Poznan events, workers' councils were formed in some of the big factories. The October Central Committee meeting gave its approval and, on 19 November 1956, a law was passed by parliament. They were to be elected at a general assembly of all employees and two thirds of their members were to be manual workers. They were given powers over the broad policy of the enterprise, over the principles for the division of the enterprise fund among the employees, over wages and conditions of work and they were also to have an 'influence' over the choice of director. Their exact powers and their exact relationship with management would, it was said, evolve in practice. In the event of conflicts, either side could appeal to a higher authority.

The most symbolic issue was the right to participate in choosing the director. Workers' councils were clearly opposed to party appointments relating only to political loyalty. They achieved the removal of some directors and ensured that vacant posts were publicly advertised. They generally stressed qualifications and experience as the key criteria for responsible posts.

At the same time, a lively debate was raging over the role and powers of the councils. They had emerged out of working class discontent. The old management and economic system and the old unions were felt to have failed to satisfy workers' aspirations. The need, so it was said, was for new, independent organs that would genuinely reflect what workers were thinking.

That still left open their exact relationship to the government and to central planning of the economy. Some participants in the debate, who were highly critical of the old 'bureaucratic centralist' model of planning, saw them creating a powerful *vertical* structure. They would be in a position to argue directly with the government. This view was condemned as 'anarchosyndicalist'. It would apparently make central planning impossible. Whether that is true or not, the same suggestion was raised again in 1981.

Another proposal often put by the same people, was to give workers' councils the ultimate authority in factories. This was the system in Yugoslavia but it too is said to conflict with central planning. Unless one person takes ultimate responsibility it is difficult to see how an enterprise can be given definite tasks. In any event, Gomulka and others in the leadership had no time for this 'revisionist' view. It probably made them more suspicious of the benefits of workers' councils and of economic reform too.

A more cautious proposal was put by Kalecki.<sup>23</sup> Changes in the economic planning system did give enterprises more independence. One aspect of this was the enterprise fund, dependent on performance, which could be divided up among the employees. That could be used to give the workers a greater interest in how their enterprise was doing. The workers' council would give them the means to ensure that it was doing well. Above all, it could prevent 'excessive bureaucratisation and centralisation of the economy'. The councils were, Kalecki thought, an important element in the system of socialist democracy taking shape at the time. They should not, however, take too much power. That could lead to economic chaos and give the opponents of change the chance to restore the old system under the guise of restoring order.

In practice the workers' councils were soon facing problems. They were being criticised, as Kalecki predicted, for causing strikes and conflicts in industry at a time when economic problems resulting from over-investment had still not been solved. There were complaints from within the party and trade union apparatus that the councils were dominating them. There were also complaints that they were becoming bureaucratised. Real power was going to a small presidium which often played the role of a small, advisory organ cut off from the workforce. An example not publicised at the time was the Warsaw car factory where the management convinced the presidium that non-manual workers' differentials should be increased. The mass of the workforce would probably have opposed this – it was one of those sources of conflict in other factories – so the presidium agreed not to exercise its power to call a general meeting.<sup>24</sup>

In this confused and fluid situation, the party took the opportunity to reassert itself. In December 1958 a law was passed creating a new body; the conference of self management. This was to 'lead and coordinate' the work of all representative bodies. It included the party and trade unions as well as the workers' council. This, it was argued, would enable the party to play a full role again and would also help the workers' council in its representative role and in avoiding 'bureaucratising tendencies'. There is strong evidence to suggest that the real reason for this change was suspicion of the powerful and independent workers' councils. It meant that they were expected to carry out the directives of a higher body.

In practice it was a major landmark in their decline. At the end of 1957 they existed in practically all factories with over 1,000 employees but by the mid 1970s they had largely disappeared and 90% of conferences of self management were formed without including them at all.<sup>25</sup> Part of the reason for this was that, without a national organisational structure and a regular source of income, they could not compete with the trade unions. It was the official unions that administered social benefits and ran newspapers, journals and a publishing house. They collected subscriptions without difficulty and they had ultimate authority over the whole self management system. The workers' councils lacked all of these but it was an even more important weakness that they became enmeshed in a system that was basically ineffective. They therefore ended up with nothing to offer.

Self management did not live up to expectations. There has been an enormous amount of research on its activities, especially in the 1960s, and a pretty consistent picture has emerged. It did not create a system

for controlling management, mobilising the workforce or defending workers' interests. Only a tiny minority were made to feel like joint managers while the great mass of the workers, and even most of the participants in the system, felt that it achieved very little. In fact it did achieve something but only for the management who had the chance for slightly wider consultation before taking a decision.

The weaknesses are clear from the composition of the bodies and the themes they discuss. Although the two thirds rule was generally applied in the workers' council, the presidium often contained no manual workers at all. Working-class representation at the full conference was very low. One survey showed that only one in every fifteen speakers was a worker. Discussion was firmly dominated by managers and engineers while workers often expressed lack of interest. Needless to say, the representation of women at all levels was extremely low, but that was not seen as a major problem.

The agendas were often prepared by the administration and reflected the issues worrying management. Plan fulfilment was the most important. The overwhelming majority of workers knew nothing of how their enterprise was doing while managers were very concerned: a large part of their income came from bonuses related to plan fulfilment. Another popular topic was labour discipline, but the issues of direct concern to workers were largely ignored. Out of 175 workers' council meetings in 36 factories in 1964 and 1965, social conditions came up only once and health and safety twice.<sup>26</sup> The detailed organisation of work, which obviously affects conditions of work very directly, also tended to be ignored.

Surveys leave no doubt that workers were extremely dissatisfied, but they still generally agreed that self management was a good idea. They wanted changes to bring in more workers and more 'bold but independent minded' people.<sup>27</sup> In their view the principal job of the workers' council should be to defend the workers. This was their main expectation of all representative organs.

Witold Morawski, who studied the topic over a number of years, concluded that if self management was to encourage workers to play a role in improving economic performance, then it had to win their confidence. That meant taking up the issues that concern them.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, he warned against 'the relics of trade unionist ideology' that were still very strong. It was in his view obvious that workers' interests were not served by an antagonistic attitude towards management. Such views had been firmly condemned after 1958 and those who criticised factory managements were swiftly dealt with.<sup>29</sup>

Despite this, the evidence does suggest that there was a real basis for conflict between the power of management and genuine workers' participation. Enterprise directors were obviously not going to go out of their way to encourage criticism. Neither were they greatly concerned with the issues that interested workers most. It was often suggested that people had neither 'the time nor the energy' to discuss everything. Management was apparently so busy trying to achieve plan targets that they had no time for 'less important' questions.

This suggests a possible explanation for the failure of self management. The Polish economy underwent a gradual process of recentralisation after 1956. There were stricter controls over enterprises and more plan indicators for them to fulfil. The basis of planning was still a set of annual targets sent to the enterprise from the association, the next link up the chain of command.

Central planning is known to be an extremely difficult task and the targets often appear unrealistic: they could be too hard or too easy. The director was unlikely to object to an easy target. He could complain about a difficult target through informal channels and personal contacts. Only after that had failed was the conference of self management likely to become involved. It had the right to comment formally on the plan, but it usually complained only when inspired to do so by powerful arguments from the management. Even then, its views could be ignored. Almost invariably it was too late by then to change the plan. Targets for other enterprises had already been approved and could hardly be changed at so late a stage.

In some cases, then, self management could strengthen the position of an enterprise director in relation to higher bodies. Generally, however, the conference was just the final stamp of approval to a plan target decided elsewhere. With so little influence over the major directions of enterprise policy, the role of self management must be limited.

This has been suggested as the most likely explanation for the higher prestige of self management bodies in enterprises that are doing well. If they can reach plan targets easily then the pressure on management is less and more funds can be made available for improving workers' conditions. Self management can take some credit for this although it is actually due to the decisions of central planners. On the other hand, when an enterprise is failing to meet plan targets resources are limited and the standing of self management suffers. The powerlessness of the workers was made particularly clear in the late 1960s. They could do absolutely nothing when cutbacks were decreed

from the centre.

It is beyond question that the autonomy of the enterprise is an extremely important influence on the powers of self management. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that something had gone wrong *within* enterprises too. Suggestions from workers on how to improve the system often mentioned relaxing the 'pressure' from the management, breaking the 'clique' that runs the factory (i.e. the director plus full-timers in charge of the party, the workers' council and the trade unions) and for a different method of conducting elections.<sup>30</sup>

In February 1970, workers in Lodz sent in 4,640 resolutions. They covered a wide range of issues, but two thirds should have been met within the place of work.<sup>31</sup> Some would require negotiating with higher authorities but it certainly looks as if the planning system was not the immediate restriction on the role of representative organs.

Although Polish sociologists have done a great deal of research on self management, and many have been led to this conclusion, they have not explained *how* it has come about. There is, however, a widespread conviction among ordinary people that, one way or another, those in power will have their way. Elections were generally reduced to a formality, with only one candidate. An opposing conception was, of course, ruled out and independent organisations not allowed. Moreover, once elected, workers were likely to feel out of their depth. They knew too little to be able to argue or to contribute. For the most part they knew nothing of relations with higher bodies in the planning process or of what freedom management really had. It is therefore really widely regarded as naïve to suggest that a worker elected to a self management body could easily be expected to change anything. That, of course, could make it easier for the management to keep control. Dissatisfied workers were unlikely to participate in what was almost universally seen as a body firmly controlled by management.

A major part of the problem must also lie in the role and nature of the party. Surveys consistently showed that it was regarded as the most powerful and effective body within self management. It discussed issues independently and then brought its ideas to the other bodies. In numerical terms too it was extremely strong. A survey in Krakow in the early 1960s showed 95% of workers' council members in the PUWP in one big factory. In the Lenin steelworks the figure was 72%.<sup>32</sup>

After 1956 the party's working class membership fell. As a proportion workers declined from 45% to 40% in 1959. After that, as the workers' councils went into decline and as the economic situation

improved, so skilled workers began to join the party again. This presumably usually indicated firm support for the socialist system, but that need not have been the decisive reason for joining. The party had the reputation for being the organisation that got things done. Managers and engineers joined too. For many of them it was a necessity if they were to achieve promotion, but it was also a means to gain some influence over decisions in the workplace.

All members, of course, were expected to abide by party policy. That meant that they were responsible to the whole party for ensuring, in the first place, plan fulfilment. They were also expected to respect the party's authority structure. In practice, that typically gave immense power to enterprise directors. One study of local politics in Poland showed them to be the dominant voice in the party's town committee<sup>33</sup> and, thanks to the *nomenklatura* system, they had enormous power over appointments. Anyone with ambitions was unlikely to offend them. In fact, on the rare occasions that a director came into conflict with a party organisation, it tended to be the full time party secretary who suffered.

The party, however, is a complex organisation. It can enhance the power of enterprise directors and a lot of its members have a reputation as obsequious yes-men. Viewed from outside it can appear as a body 'aimed at domination rather than cooperation, intent on monopolising every decision in every domain of life and mistrustful of any sort of control from without'.<sup>34</sup>

Seen from within it appears to be a highly differentiated organisation characterised by a great concentration of power into leading committees and leading individuals. In some respects and in some periods inner-party battles could be the main expression of the wider conflicts in society. The majority of members in industry are ordinary workers who have joined, in the main, so as to have some influence on what happens. They, and many of the engineers and managers too, are as dissatisfied as anyone else with the failure of self management. One detailed survey of their attitudes suggested that they differed largely by being better informed and hence clearer in their criticisms.<sup>35</sup> It is not surprising that party members were very well represented in the leadership of strikes in 1956 and 1970.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in A. Bromke and J.W. Strong, *Gierek's Poland* (New York, 1973), p.8.
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- 3a. Their 'open letter' was produced in English as J. Kuron, K. Modzelewski, *An Open Letter to the Party* (London, 1969).
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6. *Nowe Drogi*, August 1968, p.83.
7. Referred to in Leslie, *et al.*, op. cit., p.391.
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- 9a. A. Nove, *The Soviet Economic System* (London, 1977), p.157.
10. Calculated from *Rocznik statystyczny*, 1961, p.508 and *Maly rocznik statystyczny*, 1981, p.310.
11. Leslie, *et al.*, op. cit., p.447.
12. M. Kalecki, *Z zagadnieni gospodarczo-społecznych Polski Ludowej* (Warsaw, 1964), p.98.
13. Calculated from *Rocznik Statystyczny*, 1979, p.106.
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18. D. Lane and G. Kolankiewicz, *Social Groups in Polish Society* (London, 1973) pp.314-15.
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20. Matthews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union* (London, 1978).
21. Experience and Future, p.39.
22. Much of the information for this section comes from W. Morawski, *Samorząd robotniczy w gospodarce socjalistycznej* (Warsaw, 1973), C. Herod, 'O mechanizmie funkcjonowania samorządu robotniczego w zakładzie pracy', *Socjologiczne problemy przemysłu i klasy robotniczej* (Warsaw, 1966), T. Zukowski, 'Krótka historia rad robotniczych', *Polityka*, 9 May 1981 and 18 July 1981, and Lane and Kolankiewicz, op. cit.
23. Kalecki, op. cit., pp.11-23.
24. Zukowski, *Polityka*, 9 May 1981.
25. T. Jaworski, *Samorząd robotniczy rozwój i aktualne problemy* (Warsaw, 1979), p.19.
26. Morawski, op. cit., p.71.

27. Herod, 'O mechanizmie', p.51.
28. Morawski, op. cit., p.127.
29. Lane and Kolankiewicz, op. cit., p.201.
30. Herod, op. cit., p.55.
31. Morawski, op. cit., p.120.
32. Herod, op. cit., p.47.
33. See the chapter by R. Taras in Kane and Kolankiewicz op. cit.
34. Experience and Future, p.16.
35. Herod, op. cit., pp.70-1.

## 4 The Gierek Period

### *Gomulka's exit*

On Wednesday 12 December 1970 the Political Bureau accepted a proposal for a number of price changes. A letter was read out to meetings of selected party activists throughout the country. According to one account the proposals were condemned as 'madness' by the gathering in Gdansk.<sup>1</sup> There was no wider discussion and no attempt to consult with working people. It was simply announced over the radio three days later that food prices were to rise by up to 40%, some other consumer goods prices were to go up by as much as 69% while others were to be reduced. The net effect, inevitably, was to be a significant cut in the real incomes of the worst paid sections of society.

Discontent had been rising for some time before that, but this proved the opportunity for a spontaneous, collective protest. Unlike, for example, annoyance at the housing shortage, this was a single decision that affected *everyone*. The way the decision had been taken also seemed to highlight the authorities' contemptuous attitude towards ordinary people.

On the next Monday morning workers in the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk demanded discussions with the management. Another group decided to march to the party headquarters in the town where they were ordered to disperse. By the late afternoon violent clashes with the police were developing and strike action was spreading. On Tuesday the police started shooting workers leaving the shipyard, but, as with so many others of the authorities' crimes, it is still not absolutely certain who gave the order or why. It has generally been assumed that it was Gomulka's decision and that, as Gierek claimed shortly afterwards, he did not consult with the whole Political Bureau. Neither did he feel it necessary to inform the Central Committee of the situation on the coast, although it was actually meeting on the day the strikes began. He seems to have assumed that the disturbances were unimportant enough to be dealt with by a policy of sharp repression.

This, of course, was a woefully mistaken assessment. When news began to spread that strikers were being killed, some members of the crowd turned with extraordinary ferocity on the party offices. The

building was soon in flames and a number of people died inside it. Although Gierek later insisted that the demonstrations were at first orderly and disciplined, there is no doubt that large numbers of ordinary citizens tacitly supported these extreme acts of violence once it became clear that bullets were to be the only form of official response to their protest.

Gomulka, however, could only see violence coming from one side and seems to have been able to convince himself that it was the work of enemies and counter-revolutionaries. Rather than yielding, or seeking a means of consultation with the workers themselves, he opted for still firmer repression.

Early on the Wednesday morning the army occupied Gdansk and tanks guarded the main public buildings. By then, however, the strikes had become better organised. Workers' committees were elected which drew up a list of demands. The most important were substantial pay rises, a price freeze, punishment of those responsible for the state of the economy and the withdrawal of the army.

Meanwhile, even though similar events were erupting all along the coast, the authorities did their best to cut off information about what was happening. Not until Thursday 17 December were there veiled hints in the press about 'incidents' in Gdansk.

On Saturday, however, the Political Bureau held an emergency meeting on the insistence of those members who were suspicious of using only repression. The discussion was heated and lasted seven hours. It was by no means certain that Gomulka's line would be defeated. His position prior to that had been very secure. Although a lot had changed since 1956 and he was widely regarded as an unpopular leader, he still had enough loyal friends to ensure half the votes in the Political Bureau. Moreover, it could be pointed out that repression had brought an end to the street demonstrations.<sup>2</sup>

Despite that, it is hard to believe that Gomulka could have carried on for long as strikes were continuing on the coast and spreading to other parts of the country. His immediate fate, however, was decided by a mild cerebral haemorrhage. That gave his opponents the chance and the courage to replace him with Gierek who had opposed the price increases at the previous Political Bureau meeting. This change was confirmed by a Central Committee meeting the following day.

Gierek at once accepted that serious mistakes had been made. The most immediate one had been price increases 'without the indispensable compensation for families with the lowest earnings'.<sup>3</sup> That indicated an awareness of the deep feelings aroused by the extent

of inequality and by the miserable standard of living endured by the poorest sections of society. Gierek combined it with expressions of concern about other aspects of social policy, such as housing.

The tragedy, in Gierek's view, was not just this mistaken policy measure, but the failure to hold 'a frank talk with the workers'. As a result, the spontaneous demonstrations were exploited by anti-social and criminal elements and the police and army then, in his view rightly, moved in to restore order. The fault was not the use of force itself in these extreme circumstances but that the 'use of force and force alone became in practice the only answer to a workers' demonstration. And this not only did not bring any solution to the conflict, but quite the reverse – led to its aggravation, deepening and expansion, it simply threatened disaster'.

It seems that Gierek was bending over backwards to avoid criticising directly the police and army, but he was raising very clearly another of the fundamental flaws in Polish society; the lack of any means for the people to communicate their views to the leadership. It was quite clear that, in view of the realities of the power structure, they would get no response within their own factories. Moreover, to inform others of what they were demanding there was really no alternative to street demonstrations. A strike on its own would receive no publicity at all and would not even be known about by other workers.

Gierek also acknowledged a deeper problem concerning democracy as he accepted that a 'crisis of confidence in the party and government leadership' had developed thanks to the failure to respond to growing dissatisfaction with economic and social policy. There had been criticisms from party members and activists too but they had been 'treated as grumbling and rejected'.

Gierek, then, was aware of some of the deeper roots of the crisis but, in comparison with Gomulka in 1956, he was indecisive in his criticisms. He was at first also extremely weak on genuinely new proposals for developing democracy. The really important immediate measures were pay increases for the lowest paid, and for some other groups of workers where discontent was highest, a rise in pensions and a promise to freeze food prices for another two years although the December increases apparently could not be withdrawn.

These concessions might have been enough to avoid the protests over price rises, but they were totally inadequate after the December events and shipyards in Gdansk and Szczecin were on strike again in January 1971. This time they were much better organised and Gierek had to go in person to hear the grievances of workers who were

extremely bitter about what had happened. In Szczecin he was presented with an impressive list of demands starting with repeal of the price increases and going on to calls for free elections to trade unions, for an end to press censorship, for no victimisation of strike leaders and for an end to arrests of striking workers. After nine hours of heated debate, Gierek managed to win the respect of the workers.

He seemed to be talking to them as equals putting his faith in their ability to recognise that the economic situation was very difficult. Mistakes had been made and, while giving a disturbing picture of how Gomulka had stifled genuine discussion even at the very highest level, Gierek appeared to be an honest man as he did not deny his own share of responsibility. Nevertheless, he promised never to let the same mistakes happen again and appealed to the workers to help him put things right by making every effort to raise production.

They were not prepared to give him unquestioning loyalty, but they were prepared to give him a chance to show what he could do. He had not agreed to all their demands but he had promised that there would be no victimisations and that new trade-union elections would be held quickly.

With that the Szczecin strike ended, but another major strike soon began in the textile industry in Lodz. At last, having received a loan from the USSR, the leadership finally decided to repeal the price increases. Minor strikes continued over the following years and various price rises led to demonstrations of discontent. That persuaded Gierek to keep on delaying an increase in the price of meat, but he had largely been able to restabilise the power structure.

Over the following months he spoke in a seemingly frank and open manner to countless meetings of workers. This might appear to be a step towards greater democracy, but no new structures were created to give workers a *permanent* means of communication with the leadership. The main effect of the meetings was therefore to enable Gierek to win their respect and that made his own position in the party leadership effectively impregnable. His most obvious rival, Moczar, was soon removed and Kania given authority over security. Generally, Gierek was able to bring his own people into top positions very quickly. He was then free to evolve and apply his own ideas on Poland's future.

#### *No democratisation under Gierek*

Gierek's style of leadership represented a refreshing change. He did

seem to be able to narrow the gap between the leadership and the mass of the people. He made this easier by exploiting his own working class background.

He had, in fact, worked in mines in both France and Belgium. He returned home to Poland in 1948 and was elected to the Central Committee in 1954. From 1957 to 1970 he was in charge of the party in Katowice and won a reputation as a politically orthodox leader who was more approachable than most. For a time he had been seen as Gomulka's likely successor, but in 1968 he moved closer to Moczar and joined in the vociferous condemnation of 'Zionists'. He was, then, no reformer in the political sense. He wanted a change in economic policies and a different style of leadership. He wanted to maintain power without violent repression, but he had no interest in the deeper changes that subsequent events suggest were needed.

He talked of the need for a deep 'renewal' within the party, but this did not involve any institutional changes. The only one seriously suggested was the rotation of officials in top posts, but Gierek soon came out against it. He kept his solemn promise in Szczecin that there would be free elections to trade unions, but that was only allowed once and, as the strike leaders failed to conduct a serious and organised election campaign and did not dominate the new committees, it ultimately had no effect. Gierek's promise that workers would have a much bigger role in running the country proved meaningless. In fact, the strike leaders were victimised soon after the end of the strikes – some dying in mysterious circumstances – and the special commission to investigate responsibility for deaths on the Baltic coast never presented its report. Whatever successes might have been achieved in raising living standards, they could never overcome the hostility of those workers who had seen their colleagues shot dead.

There was some cautious advocacy of real change from the party's weekly journal *Polityka*. Its editor, Mieczyslaw Rakowski, accepted the basic essentials of the Polish socialist system, i.e. the dominant role of the party and the unquestioning alliance with the Soviet Union. These, he said, had brought peace and progress to Poland, but he did believe that reforms within that framework were both possible and desirable if the gap between the people and the leadership was to be narrowed. *Polityka* therefore carried articles calling for a 'new mechanism' of consultation and arguing that the vast diversity of views existing in Polish society should be allowed free expression.

These views were criticised in other papers. They were anyway only half hearted and generalised. Memories of the 'anti-Zionist' campaign,

Gierek's lack of interest and the universal awareness, after the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968, that the Soviet Union had no time for democratisation meant that there was little direct pressure for deeper political change. Before long Rakowski was writing that the new leadership had converted the nation's 'conditional' confidence into 'authentic' confidence. This enormous success, he claimed, had been achieved by fulfilling its promises. The key to Poland's prosperity had apparently been found.<sup>4</sup>

The leadership's view, as expressed at the party congress in 1975, was that socialist democracy meant primarily the reform of local administration. There were also references to the need to pay attention to the armed forces and to the role of parliament. Although there were open disagreements during its debates, it was still largely a rubber stamp on party decisions as parliament never produced independent initiatives. The principal conclusion seemed to be that the party had been able to improve its relations with the people without needing any institutional changes.

There were some signs of a more liberal and tolerant approach from the leadership, but that of course is quite different from a genuine democratisation. Permission was quickly granted for rebuilding the Royal Castle in Warsaw and relations with the church eased. The immediate cause of this was probably Gierek's desire for the church's help in calming the tense situation and in consolidating his own position. He therefore quickly made a number of minor concessions, but the old issues resurfaced in the next few years. The party was still reluctant to allow major changes and Kakol, the Minister in charge of religious affairs, made it clear within the party that his objective was to 'annihilate' the church and that he intended to 'fight unyieldingly against religion'.<sup>5</sup> This followed a proposed educational reform which would allegedly have made religious education difficult even outside school. Even before that conflicts erupted over the lack of new churches in areas of expanding population. Over the 1971-3 period a number of makeshift churches were constructed without planning permission. In some cases this was granted retrospectively. In others, the police demolished the buildings.

Repression of opposing views was certainly far milder than in most other East European countries but the state continued to stamp on serious criticisms. The key taboo areas were, as before, the socialist system, the 'leading role' of the party and the alliance with the Soviet Union. This last point was emphasised very strongly by Gierek in countless speeches: he may well have been emphasising that he had no

intention of following the road taken by Czechoslovakia in 1968, when an attempt at democratisation was crushed with the help of an armed invasion on the totally erroneous grounds that it amounted to a 'counter-revolution'.

Repression was still important in Poland as was shown by the fate of those holding meetings outside the legal framework who could face charges of 'membership of a clandestine organisation' or of 'circulating false information detrimental to the interests of the Polish state'. Imprisonment could follow.

There were, however, a number of people willing to criticise proposals for a new constitution published in December 1975. Moreover, although they did suffer victimisation and harassment, the final version made some concessions to their views. Their protests had even persuaded the church to give guarded support to their views. The important issues were whether the leading role of the party should be confirmed in the constitution, whether there should be special reference to an 'unshakeable fraternal bond with the Soviet Union' and whether citizens' rights should be made dependent on fulfilling civil duties.

Letters to parliament argued for a broader, unconditional statement of human rights and claimed that this was incompatible with one party being guaranteed a privileged position.<sup>5</sup> The proposed formulation had, of course, been incorporated into constitutions throughout Eastern Europe. Its significance is that it confirms, in those countries' most fundamental legal documents, the party's right to impose its will through the *nomenklatura* system and through the suppression of all alternative views. It is very useful to a party that holds power by administrative means, but it would have no relevance at all to one that relied on winning wider public support for its policies. In fact, it should be seen as an obstacle to that because – by giving legal sanction to political inequality and to the effective exclusion of the majority from participating in power – it reinforces the prevalent resentment towards the party. That was the view of many more Poles than the small number who signed letters of opposition.

There were also many who agreed that the recognition of an international alliance as a constitutional norm binding one side only is tantamount to voluntarily accepting a restriction on the country's sovereignty. This, of course, would only have given the additional force of law to a position already propagated repeatedly and aggressively by the country's leaders. It was understandable if the aim was simply to make it easier to stamp on any well organised

movement critical of the USSR. That, however, was no way to create genuine friendship between the peoples of the two countries.

By preventing an honest and open discussion of Poland's history and of the role of the Soviet Union, the regime has managed to ensure that events such as the Katyn massacre could still be live issues. It is obvious that uncritical adulation of the Soviet Union – and continual insistence that it is almost universally recognised as Poland's best friend – can only be dishonest. The natural response of the mass of the Polish population to such propaganda is to overreact in the opposite direction. 'The dislike, to put it mildly, for the Soviet Union has assumed, in broad segments of our society, an almost pathological character', commented one respondent to the DiP report discussed later in this chapter.<sup>7</sup>

Put in that context the call for a change in the proposals for the constitution was in no sense an extreme position. In fact, the offending passages were toned down considerably in the final version. Rights were no longer linked to fulfilling duties, the party was only given the status of the 'guiding political force' and there was just a broad statement that Poland 'strengthens its friendship and co-operation with the USSR and other socialist countries'. One MP abstained. He was from the Znak group which had been given a small presence in parliament after 1956. It differed from the church hierarchy by accepting a more active role in politics, although it was still very cautious and denied having any sort of political ambitions of its own. It differed from Pax in that it did not support socialism as a point of principle. Instead, it accepted socialism as 'a reality, but a reality capable of evolution' which should lead 'towards a more just, more humane and pluralistic society'.<sup>8</sup> It was the nearest to an independent political body that the regime could accept, but its genuine freedom was very limited. That MP's name did not appear on the list of candidates for the next election.

It is clear from this that the political changes under Gierek were small. In view of his half-hearted measures and broken promises, he could never expect to win anything approaching overwhelming and unquestioning public confidence. There could never be any doubt that there was a clear gap between the rulers and the ruled. He was, however, able to maintain political stability and convince much of the population that he was leading Poland out of its crisis. The key to this, and ultimately the key to Gierek's failure too, was economic policy.

*Gierek's new economic strategy*

At first Gierek had no clear economic policy. There was no option but to grant wage increases which had the immediate effect of accentuating the market disequilibrium. Retracting Gomulka's price increases threatened to make the situation worse. It was only made possible by loans, the first one being from the Soviet Union, which could be used to buy consumer goods.

This could make his criticisms of Gomulka appear more credible and he was soon instituting what became known as the 'new socio-economic policy'. This centred around the proposition that rising living standards were not an alternative to industrial growth. Instead, higher wages should be an incentive to higher productivity as expressed in the slogan 'better pay for better work'.

Revisions of the plan for the 1971-5 period indicated this greater emphasis on consumption, and growth was still to be fairly rapid. There was still to be a concentration on a number of specially important sectors, but these now included consumer goods. In light industry and the food industry there was to be more investment than had taken place in the whole preceding twenty years.

The first results were extremely encouraging. Industry was growing more rapidly than at any time since the early 1950s. Moreover, production of consumer goods was rising especially rapidly.

The reasons for this success were largely chance circumstances, or one-off events. Agriculture did well because of good harvests, especially in 1972. That helped the industries using agricultural raw materials. The labour force was also expanding and the price of coal on the world market was rising relative to the price of Poland's imports. Moreover, the Polish government was finding it fairly easy to raise loans in the West. This obviously meant that more could be imported.

This does not prove that there had been a real improvement in Poland's prospects. Gierek, however, was keen to exploit the good results to consolidate his own position. In a peculiar reversion to the false over-optimism of earlier periods he decided to raise the plan targets. This was announced at a party conference in November 1973. Soon, however, even those targets were being surpassed as the share of investment in national income rose to match the peak level of the 1950s.

The statistics for the early 1970s show that the Polish economy

did grow at a very rapid rate. It was, at last, comparable to Japan in its best years. Moreover, as the table below indicates, consumption was rising rapidly too. This was the period of its fastest growth in socialist Poland. New goods were becoming available and the danger of unemployment had been averted. Effectively all of the new generation had found jobs while continuation with Gomulka's strategy would, it was estimated, have led to half a million unemployed by 1975.

TABLE 5

Five Year Plan 1971-1975<sup>9</sup>  
(1970 = 100)

	<i>Planned for 1975 in 1971</i>	<i>Planned for 1975 in 1973</i>	<i>Realised</i>
National income	139	155	159
Industry	150	166	164
Agriculture	119-121	125,5	120
Real wages	118	138	140

On the face of it, this was a tremendous achievement, but it had only been made possible by allowing the build up of a large debt with the West. This grew rapidly after 1973 and passed \$8000m in 1975. Some of the loans had been used to finance higher consumption, but a great deal was going into seemingly sensible investment projects. In the new international atmosphere following West Germany's recognition of the post-war boundaries in Europe, Western banks were being encouraged by their governments to lend to Poland. It was beneficial to their domestic economies in a time of depression as it gave the Poles the opportunity to buy their industrial equipment.

At first, Poland's credit worthiness was excellent. There were practically no outstanding debts. By 1975, however, it was judged to be running towards the limits as measured by its total debt relative to hard currency exports. It was agreed, however, that it had the ability to expand exports rapidly in the future and this enabled it to continue borrowing. The point was that Polish industry was probably the newest in Europe. Half its fixed assets in 1975 were said to be less than five years old. Moreover, it claimed to have been concentrating on certain sectors which had good prospects for exporting. Once the

depression lifted in the West, so it was argued, Polish industry would be in a very strong position to win markets, earn foreign currency and reduce the level of indebtedness.

There were reasons to doubt this. The terms of trade had, with the oil price rises in 1973, become highly unfavourable to Poland. Moreover, the trade deficit with the capitalist countries, which first appeared in 1972, was growing at a phenomenal rate. By 1975 exports only paid for 60% of imports while the rest was covered by loans. To reverse this situation would have required a pretty dramatic change in Poland's fortunes. It was therefore almost inevitable that Western bankers would soon become reluctant to lend any more.

Moreover, there were problems within the domestic economy. There were the familiar symptoms of over-investment as industry and construction began to suffer from shortages of raw materials, energy and intermediate goods and, despite the rapid rise in consumption, there were still shortages of consumer goods.

Meat was a persistent problem. Its price was kept down at the 1965 level while – as in the early 1950s – money wages were increasing rapidly. Inevitably, demand rose very quickly so that despite higher production, made possible by grain and fodder imports, the imbalance between supply and demand increased. In human terms this meant that people had to queue, often for several hours a day, and might still go away empty handed. It was possible, despite the reality of higher consumption overall, to hear people complaining that they were actually worse off than before.

This was true for some of those in fixed incomes. Student grants reached their peak in real terms in 1973 and then declined as the strains on the economy left little to spare for those in a weak bargaining position. Old people also suffered with the average pension relative to the average earnings lower in 1975 than it had been in 1970. One of Gierek's most important promises was being forgotten amid the excited optimism of his investment drive.

Two other highly sensitive issues were housing and the health service. Housing was, by British standards, appalling. There are roughly twice the numbers of people per room compared with Britain, while even in 1979 only a third of the rural population had running water. The reasons for this are the abysmal situation in 1945 and the rate of building since then which has been continually restricted by the demands of industry.

Gierek was therefore making a very popular promise when, in 1972, the Central Committee approved a programme which aimed to

provide every family with a house or flat by 1990. That meant building 7,3m housing units. It was a highly optimistic target that could not possibly be realised especially after problems became apparent in the construction and building materials industries. In fact a lot of housing units were built in the 1970s. The total number increased by  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million as new estates appeared throughout the country. This, however, was simply not a fast enough rate of construction. In fact, the housing shortage actually *increased* from 1,3 million in 1970 to 1,6 million in 1978. The reason for this extraordinary paradox was the peculiar population structure. Large numbers of people were getting married so that they were entitled to expect a flat. To satisfy this rapidly increasing demand, the rate of house building should have been much faster. As it was the average waiting time for a flat increased to 9-10 years. In Warsaw it was 15 years.

The problems of the health service caused almost as much bitterness. In terms of doctors per head of the population Poland does well by international standards. The weakness has been in the expansion of hospital facilities which was very slow during the 1970s. It left Poland backward by Eastern European as well as Western standards. Moreover, this was a period of rapidly rising demand partly because more people were living into old age and also because, from 1972, the peasants were given the right to free medical treatment. The situation varied enormously throughout the country and that itself was a cause of bitterness. Nobody seemed to know how the decisions had been taken and they were simply forced to accept their lot. In many areas conditions were quite obviously worsening.

Radom, a town of 160,000 in 1970, may have been the worst. Its population expanded during the 1970s as industrial employment grew, but nothing was added to the existing hospital facilities. In terms of beds per head it had half the average level for Poland as a whole, or about one third of the Italian level. In human terms this meant that there was simply not enough room to accommodate all those in need of immediate treatment and cases were reported of people dying in hospital corridors.

These problems meant that there was always a degree of scepticism towards Gierek's 'propaganda of success'. This attitude was strengthened in 1975 when shortages were becoming more serious.

Problems came to a head after a particularly bad harvest in 1975. This coincided with poor results in the Soviet Union so that additional grain would have to be imported from the West and paid for in hard

currency. This could only be done if exports to the West could be increased at the expense of domestic consumption.

All the arguments pointed to the need to raise the price of meat. The only question was whether to do it slowly, by a number of small increases, or with one single, massive blow. With the benefit of hindsight, it might have been better to do it gradually. The outcome could not have been much worse than what did happen.

In the event the decision was for a single big increase announced in parliament on Thursday 24 June 1976. Food prices were to rise by between 30 and 100%. Meat was to go up by 69%. In total, the average food bill was to be increased by 40%. Wage increases were also promised which would go some way towards compensating.

### *1976 and after*

There had been hints beforehand of the need for a 'flexible pricing policy' and for an examination of the prices of basic foods, but there had been no consultation with the population and hardly anyone expected such enormous increases in one go. In its announcement, the government said that discussions would be held on the following day and the vote taken in parliament immediately afterwards. It is unclear, however, who was to be involved as there had been no prior preparations for a genuine public debate. In fact the tone of the government statements up to then had been to continue reassuring the population that Gierek's strategy had been right and that the economy was enjoying a period of phenomenal success.

Under these circumstances workers were unlikely to be enthusiastic about accepting a cut in their living standards. In fact, it was widely seen as a betrayal of the promises whereby Gierek had won a degree of popular acceptance. Strikes broke out in many parts of the country on the Friday morning and on the next day the price increases were withdrawn.

In most areas the workers stayed inside their factories and there were cases of worker-management meetings preparing joint statements. In the Ursus tractor factory near Warsaw and in Radom strikers went into the streets and violence followed. There is still controversy about exactly what happened but it seems that the workers in Radom's largest engineering factory were unable to hold meaningful discussions with their management. They therefore went to the local party offices. Again, they were left with nobody answering their questions. After a few hours workers, some of whom were by

then drunk, entered the building and ransacked it. Meanwhile, in another part of town, a small group of hooligans systematically smashed shop windows and looted. The police did absolutely nothing to prevent this and only moved into the town in force in the evening. By the end of the day there had been a number of deaths and there were accusations that one happened in police custody.

Over the following days large numbers of workers were arrested and claim to have been severely beaten in police custody. Hundreds of workers lost their jobs – despite the existence of legal protection against arbitrary dismissal – and over 200 were jailed on the basis of police evidence. They were charged primarily with participating in an unlawful assembly which had allegedly culminated in injuries to the police and enormous damage to property. The implication of this is that anyone on the streets at the time could be held jointly responsible for everything that happened.

There were members of the public who had no sympathy for the arrested workers, but the authorities' reaction must be seen as a key episode leading Poland towards a still deeper crisis. It seemed to confirm the view – held according to opinion surveys by a majority of the population – that all are not equal before the law. It seemed, in fact, to prove that the whole legal system could be manipulated by those in power to crush their opponents. It was also very widely believed – and this has now been proven to be absolutely true – that top people could place themselves above the law and pilfer state funds for their own private benefit. The crisis was a moral and political one concerning the whole way how society was organised. It was certainly not just a question of food prices.

This time, however, the leadership could do nothing to restore any genuine confidence. Faced with nothing but repression, many workers decided to fight back. Letters of protest, with large numbers of signatures, were sent to official bodies. Even more important, a new organisation was formed to help the victimised workers and their families.

This was KOR, the Committee for Defence of the Workers. It stated from the start that it had no wider political aims and made a point of working openly to ensure that its members could not be accused of joining a clandestine organisation. It raised money to help victimised workers and it promised to end its activities once all the imprisoned workers had been released and given fair compensation and once a parliamentary enquiry had been started into the alleged police brutality.

Despite the limited aims of KOR, its members obviously did have wider political views. Generally they were the more left wing opponents of the regime. Particularly prominent was Kuron who had substantially revised his earlier views. In an interview with *Le Monde* on 29 January 1977 and in a subsequent clarificatory note he outlined his conception of the 'Finlandisation' of Poland.<sup>10</sup>

In his view the essential issue was the political system. He saw labels relating to capitalist countries as irrelevant. Instead the relevant conflict was between 'totalitarianism' and 'pluralism'. He saw no reason to doubt that significant changes would be possible: there was 'no need to be blinded by the Czechoslovak experience'. Although the Soviet Union would be prepared to invade Poland under certain circumstances, its leaders would be prepared to make concessions to avoid this.

The key to his strategy was the creation of 'social movements' outside the party but still operating in a public and open way. These would strengthen the hand of those in the PUWP leadership who might be willing to bargain for greater independence in internal policies. This was the thinking behind the conversion of KOR into KSS, the Committee for Social Self Defence, in October 1977. Its aim was to press the government to honour its commitment to human rights statements.

This clearly differed from earlier ideas on democratisation. Unlike the Czechoslovak events of 1968, Kuron was advocating a gradual and cautious process. Moreover, he placed a new emphasis on movements *outside* the party working to extend the limits of permissible political change. As the objective was not the simple overthrow of those in power, it depended to some extent on changes within the party. This did not seem unrealistic. Rakowski, himself a Central Committee member, was later quoted as saying that he agreed with much of what the 'dissidents' were saying.

Proof that Rakowski was not alone among top officials was the emergence of DiP, the discussion group 'Experience and Future'. Initially enjoying official acceptance, it held its first and only plenary meeting in November 1978 and later compiled three detailed reports on the basis of questionnaires sent to leading figures in academic, cultural and industrial life. Their comments were in many cases similar to those of the mass of the population, but they were based on far more understanding and experience of how the system really worked and that made the reports extremely valuable. They showed a very deep disillusionment with the existing model of socialism. The

fundamental problem was that those in power had lost the trust of society. That had reached such an absurd level that people, knowing the information in the mass media to be manipulated by the leadership, immediately suspected any story to be a lie or a cover up for some horrific fact. 'No, this is not even understandable scepticism. It is naïve credulity in reverse. People who trust no one and believe nothing will tomorrow accept the most improbable rumours.'<sup>11</sup> This, it should be added, is in no sense an exaggerated view. Neither is it only true of Poland. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe too there are young people who proudly proclaim that they do not believe there is unemployment in the West. They see themselves as too clever to be fooled by official propaganda.

The causes of this distrust, it was argued, were to be found in the system of arbitrary and uncontrolled power. There was, however, less agreement on how to lead the country out of the crisis. Nevertheless it was almost unanimously accepted that fundamental reforms were essential before 'society' could believe that 'it will be treated seriously'. Measures that could help towards this included greater powers and independence for parliament and the acceptance of 'various kinds of self-governing institutions'. The crucial issue, however, was whether the people would have real control over the authorities by being able, if they so wished, to vote them out of power.

On this the respondents were cautious trying to find a formula that would leave the political leaders with a 'controlling share' in power while simultaneously forcing them to heed outside pressures. One possibility – described as 'an institution somewhat resembling genuine elections' – was for a new electoral system that would enable choice between various PUWP candidates. Nobody was arguing for allowing an opposition party, although it was accepted that the PUWP's leading role was not based on anything approaching universal acceptance for its ideology. It is not clear why this possibility was so assiduously evaded. It could have reflected the conviction that the Soviet leadership would never allow such a change, or it could have reflected natural conservatism among people in top positions.

More immediately, it was suggested that the authorities could restore some confidence if they instigated 'an hour of truth'. Complete and unfalsified information on the state of the republic would be published and the leadership would initiate a major programme of reform, starting with the economy.

It was not suggested that the way to achieve this would involve mass workers' struggle. If anything, the mass of the people were seen

sinking into apathetic disillusionment. In fact, the DiP respondents were generally pessimistic about the future, but placed their main faith in discussion circles, analogous to the clubs that played so important a role in 1956.

Many other groups appeared in the late 1970s. There was also a great mass of uncensored journals that put a wide range of views. Some took up the demands of particular sections of the population while others sought a solution to Poland's wider problems.

One group, the Confederation of Independent Poland, even proclaimed itself to be a new political party in 1979 and tried to put up candidates at the next parliamentary election. Its leading figure, Leszek Moczulski, was a historian and journalist with a strong attachment to Poland's nationalist traditions. He was a controversial figure among opponents of the regime partly because of an alleged association with Moczar and accusations of anti-semitism. His group was certainly not a major political force at the time.

KOR was far more important. Although made up of intellectuals it managed to build up contacts and trust throughout the working class. Previously social groups had opposed the government alone. In 1968 it was only students and intellectuals. In 1970-71 the movement was confined to the working class and remained largely at the level of protest against government policies. The steps towards creation of a broader opposition movement were important in helping to give it a clearer purpose.

In the atmosphere of growing political ferment, even the church began cautiously to broaden the scope of its criticisms. Presumably in an effort to stabilise the regime's position, Gierek stated that there were no longer any substantial conflicts between church and state. Wyszynski was quick to deny that. Not long afterwards he was demanding an end to censorship and the right to publish at least one independent daily. This would have strengthened the church's religious role and also made it harder for the authorities to give a misleading account of its political position.

More immediately the church joined in the accusations of police brutality, but it was careful not to identify itself fully with KOR. Its hand was strengthened by the government's loss of credibility and the election of a Polish Pope which was seen by the great majority of the people as a major source for renewed national pride. Millions came to give him a rapturous welcome when he visited his home country in June 1979. Despite this, the church was still never the leading force for political change. It still believed that too obvious an involvement in

politics could endanger its religious role, but its existence and tacit approval was a great encouragement to all critics of the government. In the end the imprisoned workers were released in an amnesty before all the sentences had been completed. Those dismissed from work were generally accepted back again, albeit at lower pay, but there was no investigation of police behaviour.

It has been argued that the party leadership at the time could consider two alternatives. One section of the apparatus was pressing for 'strengthening' the leading role by firmer repression. This must have been rejected as, although KOR did suffer official harrassment, there was no determined effort to wipe it out. It would certainly have been a very dangerous course in view of the extent of public disillusionment. Ultimately, even a highly repressive government needs to have some degree of backing. Moreover, economic difficulties made Poland increasingly dependent on the goodwill of the West and that might have been put at risk by too harsh a policy.

The chosen alternative was the 'strategy of manoeuvre' which meant, in the words of a DiP respondent, 'relative tactical flexibility combined with the extreme rigidity of the system'. Within this there was scope for buying off sections of the working class should the need arise and for a whole range of changes that had no immediate implications for the power structure. The most obvious example was the attitude towards national traditions. Gierek went further than Gomulka in presenting himself as a Polish patriot. The sixtieth anniversary of the rebirth of the Polish state was celebrated in 1978 and a statue of Pilsudski was unveiled. The opportunistic nature of this act was clear from the fact that, although Pilsudski's policies could hardly have been applauded by any Communist, there was no attempt to give a full and truthful account of his life or to initiate a discussion that could lead to a balanced assessment. Instead he was simply recognised as a great figure in Poland's past.

In essence, however, the strategy of manoeuvre meant seeing the problem as primarily an economic one. Gierek in fact referred to overcoming the crisis with the help of an 'economic manoeuvre' which was to mean continuing with the same broad strategy only under more difficult conditions.

Resources were to be shifted away from investment to consumption, thereby restoring market equilibrium. Agricultural output was to be increased thanks to a new agricultural policy and it was strongly emphasised that exports to the capitalist countries had to be raised. Overall, the rate of economic growth was to be reduced to

about 7% annually.

In practice, this more modest target was never reached. Part of the problem was a horrific run of bad luck. One bad harvest followed another, Poland's terms of trade showed no sign of improving and depression in the capitalist countries further restricted exports. At the same time, there were very serious failings with the management of the Polish economy as the level of investment remained very high. Many of the really big projects were only just starting, but the strains on the economy were to become so enormous that there was no chance of completing them all.

Meanwhile, the foreign debt escalated and passed \$20m at the beginning of 1980. The problem by then was that, while exports were not even covering imports, interest payments were adding almost another \$2bn to the debt every year. There was no longer any basis to believe that this could be repaid in the foreseeable future. The willingness of Western banks to continue lending was reaching its limit and that indicated imminent disaster for the Polish economy.

Gierek continued to insist that his policy of the 1970s had been correct. Its future success, he claimed, depended on improving the 'effectiveness' of the economy. Self management and worker participation were to play a major role in this, but there is no reason to suppose that they were any more effective than in earlier periods. The role of workers' councils was certainly smaller than ever and in the first half of 1980 only six factories bothered to elect one. Nevertheless, a new law in 1978 ensured that one third of the members of the conferences of self management were workers chosen directly from production teams. Many of these people were outspokenly critical and were soon to become prominent activists within Solidarity.<sup>12</sup>

#### *The nature and causes of Gierek's crisis*

The decomposition of the regime's credibility in the late 1970s raised major questions about the model of socialism that had been developed after the Second World War. It is quite clear that the crisis of 1980 did not suddenly appear out of the blue. It was a repetition, or the culmination, of a series of crises. The regime could *never* fully overcome the problems it faced in 1956 which stemmed not only from the specific errors and crimes of the Stalin period but, more generally, from the absence of any institutional mechanism of popular control and participation in the system of power.

It seems, in fact, that the crisis was becoming more intractable with

each cyclical recurrence. In 1956 the party could raise its prestige probably to a higher level than ever before. It had a political leader with enormous public respect and a number of changes were instituted at once that could be interpreted as the beginnings of a completely new approach. With Gierek in 1971 there was less room for manoeuvre, but he could still promise a number of new policies. By 1976 it was clear that he had failed. The new commitments were utterly trivial in comparison with 1956 and even 1971. It was quite inevitable that more and more people would begin to see the fundamental problem as lying in the system itself rather than just in particular individuals.

The essential point, as has already been indicated, is the structure of political power. It is not that different in Poland from the other Eastern European countries and they do share many of the same problems. In Poland, however, the crisis has reached a more severe form than in any other European socialist country for a very long time. Several Polish economists have insisted that this is due almost to chance. Other countries drew back from mistaken policies just in time while Poland continued through the mid 1970s with dangerously high levels of borrowing.

There are, however, certain specifically Polish features that may have made it more susceptible to those mistakes. One is the great strength of national and religious traditions that make it exceptionally hard to win acceptance for a regime that advocates a voluntary restriction on national sovereignty. That, plus the clear evidence of periodic instability, could have made it harder for Gierek to acknowledge that there were serious difficulties. It could also have encouraged both Gomulka and especially Gierek to look for inspiringly ambitious economic strategies.

That temptation could have been increased by another Polish peculiarity, the existence of a large emigre community living in advanced capitalist countries. It has been estimated that there may be 10 million people of Polish origin living in other parts of the world.

Many in the second and third generations have lost interest, but there was a large addition to the emigre community when many Poles did not return home after the Second World War.

This means that people in Poland are very likely to have friends and relatives in the West. That does not mean that the mass of the Polish people are convinced by the alleged benefits of capitalism, but they are fully aware of the gap in living standards.

These points are not intended to imply that, given Polish history

and the nature of Polish society, the present crisis was inevitable. They merely suggest that it was more *likely* in Poland than elsewhere. The crucial point is to find the cause of mistaken *economic* policies, but that does not mean that the crisis is purely an economic one. It involves, as we have seen, a very general loss of trust in the authorities.

Economic policies, however, were the arena in which the regime's secretiveness, corruption, incompetence and contempt for the people were shown up for all to see in their starker form. It is in the difficult and complex task of managing the economy that an autocratic and unyielding power structure is at its worst, so that the contrast between highly ambitious promises and mediocre performance becomes most apparent. Moreover, this is a particularly difficult and important task in a *socialist* economy where the government has taken on so large a responsibility. It is no longer possible to blame failures on private firms — which no longer exist — or on foreign competitors — international trade is under firm government control — or even on policies of parties that held power before. It would also be utterly absurd to expect people to believe the myth that economic difficulties are due to forces beyond human control: one of the most basic arguments for a socialist economy is that social control over the means of production can prevent the periodic crises experienced under capitalism. The government and the party have taken full responsibility. If they claim all the credit for successes they must expect all the blame for failures. Economic disappointments are therefore a major factor continually nurturing the seeds of cynicism and distrust towards the political leadership in general.

This strong emphasis on the structure of political power does not imply acceptance of the view that the fundamental conflict in the world is between 'totalitarianism' and 'democracy'. 'Totalitarianism' is often used as a description of a system in which one party has a monopoly of power. A more complete theory was developed in the post-war period with Brzezinski, President Carter's foreign policy adviser, playing a prominent role.

The argument, in essence, is that the political structure alone defines and dictates the nature of society as a whole. An 'elite' holds absolute power over the 'mass' who are all in the same boat: they are terrorised by repression and totally powerless. Differences of class or social standing therefore become irrelevant or disappear altogether.

This theory had more credibility in the Stalin period, but it is now clear that the 'elites' can be swayed by outside pressure. It is also

undeniable that there are real differences between the standing and attitudes of various social groups. Moreover, it is undeniable that there have been enormous social changes, especially in the position of the working class. That has been an important factor enabling the regime to command significant loyalty. Power was certainly not always based on repression alone.

Totalitarian theories are also wrong on ideological and cultural policy. It is simply not true that the regime tries to impose a single world view. Diversity very definitely exists. It does, however, set firm limits which prevent what it sees as open opposition to its position of power or to the absolute fundamentals of policy, such as the relationship with the Soviet Union.

Perhaps the most serious criticism of all is that totalitarian theories cannot explain the decentralization and democratization that has taken place. Absolute power leaves no scope for liberalisation or for the relaxation of centralised control over the economy associated with market-oriented economic reforms. Changes could presumably occur only if the 'elite' wants them which means that they could hardly threaten its absolute power over all aspects of society. The other possibility would seem to be complete destruction of the whole totalitarian social order.

Strong criticisms can also be made of those theories that over-emphasise the cohesiveness and unity of purpose of the ruling group to give it the status of a ruling *class*. A well known exponent of this view was Milovan Djilas, once a leading Yugoslav Communist, who referred to the emergence of a 'new class'. Although private ownership of the means of production had been abolished, that did not mean that the mass of the people had any real say. Instead he argued that, despite the legal situation of public ownership, there was a 'political bureaucracy' that had the real control over the means of production.

Such views are of more than theoretical interest because they do correspond to the thinking of many Poles. It is frequently argued that economic difficulties have been caused by a ruling minority which *does* benefit from a situation and system which does not serve the interests of the majority of society. This view was even voiced by one of the DiP respondents. It could lead to the notion of a ruling class able to dictate government policies that serve only its own sectional interests.

It is, however, wrong to liken those in power to a ruling class under capitalism. One reason for this is that there is nothing comparable to the significant and socially cohesive privileged minority who own the

bulk of productive resources in capitalist countries. Neither has a convincing theory been produced to show systematic exploitation of one group by another.

An even more important reason for rejecting 'new class' theories is that they are not helpful for an understanding of the roots of conflicts and failures. Those stem from a system of political power within which even many members of the privileged few have very little direct say over policies. Important information and power over crucial decisions are very highly concentrated and this is a crucial factor in explaining economic disappointments and hence political crises. The 'anarchy of production' specific to capitalism, and the recurrent crises associated with it, have been abolished by the nationalisation of industries, but rational economic policy making is prevented by the lack of participation and scope for criticism. It has therefore been argued, among others by Włodzimierz Brus once a senior adviser to the Polish government who was dismissed under accusations of 'revisionism' in 1968, that the means of production may have been 'nationalised', but they have certainly not been 'socialised'. That requires a further gradual process of democratisation.

Material privileges do play a role. They make the top people less willing to allow scope for public criticism which could threaten their position. Moreover, the rulers are less aware than the mass of the people of shortages, because they are protected by special sources of supplies. That can encourage them to press on with unrealistic investment plans, but the fundamental explanation for those errors is to be found in the structure of power. This is the basis for understanding the sheer depth of the economic crisis of the late 1970s. The problem was not due purely to bad weather and changes in the international economy, although both of these factors accentuated the difficulties.

The point becomes even clearer from a comparison with Hungary which, in proportion to its size, was *more* heavily in debt. It had, however, used the loans more constructively and was able to export enough to the West to cover almost all its hard currency imports, despite its lack of large raw material reserves. In 1979 charges on debts were 37% of revenue earned on exports to the West. For Poland the figure was already a staggering 92%.

Neither was the failure predominantly due to agriculture, although that was assumed by many people to be the main problem owing to the shortages of food. In fact, serious mistakes had been committed in agricultural policy despite Gierek's early promises. In the 1971-75

period private farmers were helped by a 40% increase in purchase prices paid by the state. This, the key to raising earnings in agriculture, contrasted with an increase of 21% throughout the whole of the 1960s. Moreover, peasants were freed from the quotas which compelled them to deliver certain quantities of produce to the state. They could enter into contractual obligations in exchange for loans and goods in short supply. The great advantage for them compared with the old system was that they could specialise in a particular branch of agriculture. Without that they could never reach a high technological level.

Nevertheless, despite a verbal acceptance that progress had to rely largely on private agriculture, the government still believed that state and co-operative farms were the form for the future. It was a source of pride that the state's share of all land was increasing through the 1970s, reaching 25% in 1978 thanks to the absorption of small farms. In some cases the owners died without a successor taking over, in other cases they handed over the land in exchange for a state pension. This, however, should never have been a source of rejoicing as it was related to a very serious problem for Polish agriculture.

The point was that private transfer of land was not possible under all circumstances. A farmer could not automatically hand over his farm to his son. The young people therefore tended to leave the villages. Alternative jobs were available and, perhaps as important, they had no other means of leading a life free from continuing parental authority. The result was an ageing and embittered population, unable to modernise agriculture. By the late 1970s a quarter of all farms were facing imminent liquidation on the death of their owners.

There is no doubt that the archaic pattern of land ownership, with its small farms and scattered strips, needed to be changed. The government's solution, however, was not encouraging young and active people to work on the farms. With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been better to allow freer sale and purchase of land, more resources to private agriculture and a general improvement in living conditions in the countryside. Once forced collectivisation has been ruled out, there does not seem to be any alternative to encouraging private agriculture.

This should have helped to improve agriculture's performance, but there were bound to be difficulties after the disastrous decision to raise the level of investment in 1973. Agriculture, like social services, was then starved of resources for investment and what was available was

largely allocated to the state farms. Moreover, failures in industry meant that the promised fertilisers and tractors could not be delivered and that production of manufactured consumer goods increased too slowly to take the pressure off demand for food.

Problems in industry, as has been indicated, had a lot in common with the strains caused by over-investment in the early 1950s. Some vital sectors of the economy had been expanded too slowly and were creating 'barriers' to the completion of the large number of investment projects. The most important examples were electricity and railways. Transport breakdowns were so common that even passenger trains might simply fail to appear, while the chronic shortage of electricity was leading to frequent domestic power cuts.

Kalecki's argument had been that such bottlenecks were the inevitable consequence of aiming for too high a level of investment. As he put it in his classic work published in 1963 'unsurmountable difficulties arise whenever the expansion of a particular industry exceeds a certain rate'.<sup>13</sup> That, however, can hardly be a complete explanation. Even higher levels of investment as a proportion of national income have been achieved in some capitalist countries. In Japan it averaged over 30% for the whole period from 1950 to 1970 without leading to the same sort of disaster. In Poland it was significantly lower although the peak figures were 32% in 1953 and 36% in 1974. Moreover, as one of the respondents to the DiP report emphasised, 'the coordination of energy and transport needs with production growth is one of the simplest planning tasks. After years of experience, investment planning should have become virtually a professional speciality of the socialist economy. However, it is precisely here that it has suffered its most bitter defeat'.<sup>14</sup>

The problem is not the existence of *absolute* barriers, but the inability of an autocratic power structure to enable rational planning under conditions of rapid growth. It was even suggested that the whole system could be seen 'as a gigantic plot meant to compromise the authorities, undermine confidence in them, and encourage attitudes of opposition and rebellion'.<sup>15</sup>

Not surprisingly, there was widespread disillusionment with highly centralised planning. There was an attempt at economic reform in the mid 1970s, but it fell far short of the decentralisation proposed in the late 1950s or as implemented in Hungary in 1968. It merely delegated authority to a number of 'Large Economic Organisations' which controlled branches of industry.

That might have improved economic performance but the

experiment was short-lived. The appearance of chronic shortages forced a considerable recentralisation in 1976. That left enterprises aiming for set targets and did not force them to search for the most efficient methods of production. That is widely believed to have contributed to waste and inefficiency and to have helped ensure that Polish industry probably used more energy per unit of output than any other in the world.<sup>16</sup> That – alongside some ill-judged investment decisions which relied on very energy-intensive technology – was the explanation for the failure of the authorities to prevent the appearance of an energy shortage in a country that was producing enormous amounts of electricity considering its general level of development.

The argument in the early 1970s had been that the ideal system in Hungary was not necessarily the best for Poland, but a more comprehensive economic reform could well have served to show the genuine benefits of economic planning. There should be enormous advantages in a government controlling major investment decisions, which are left under central control in Hungary, provided they are adequately discussed and investigated first. Unfortunately, ‘the system of information in its present form, which mystifies an accurate picture of reality, ensures that the fundamental premises for any decision are mistaken’.<sup>17</sup> Government reports on the state of the economy were kept so secret that even many people in powerful positions were only informed by rumour and innuendo that the economy was entering its deepest ever crisis.

This point is essential. Despite the *apparent* concentration of power, it is actually impossible for a handful of people to control a whole economy. ‘In the real social and economic world there is no such thing as a central planner.’<sup>18</sup> Instead there are mysterious and secretive processes whereby important policies are decided. These may depend on the – necessarily superficial – assessment of the Prime Minister who has neither the ability nor the resources to ensure coordination of investment projects.

The sort of problem this could lead to was illustrated by the experience of Paweł Bozyk, former adviser to Gierek, who was interviewed in *Polityka* on 29 November 1980. He concluded that the leadership had themselves effectively boycotted the policy of the economic manouevre. Investment projects continued to be sanctioned with blasé assurances that ‘it could be done without harming other projects’, although, as Bozyk pointed out, there was no evidence that they had listened to any advice on this.

This sort of behaviour may have stemmed from the uncontrollable

whims and fads of the top party leaders, but two structural factors were probably more important. The first was the sheer impossibility of anybody getting totally reliable information. There was a widespread belief that people all the way up the economic hierarchy were faking results to impress their superiors. Without scope for public investigation and criticism – which could have been achieved by anyone from journalists to workers' representatives – it was impossible for those at the top to know that they were being given a totally distorted picture. They could not do anything about 'sham planning and sham fulfilment of plans', which developed alongside 'sham voting and elections, sham morality ... and sham claims of a contented citizenry. Playing this game of pretence and sham has become so universal that no one, not even at the highest levels of power, can distinguish any longer between what is real and what is not.'<sup>19</sup>

The other crucial factor, which was widely regarded in 1980 and 1981 as a major cause of economic blunders, was the growth of 'industrial lobbies'. Obscure and secretive decision making processes could be strongly influenced by a word in the right ear from powerful pressure groups representing regional and sectoral interests. Thus the heavy industry lobby could argue for enormous new investment in the Katowice steel works. Built with Soviet assistance, it was to be producing 9 million tons of steel annually by 1980. The whole project was disastrously misconceived and is still a long way from completion.

This was by no means a unique example. As the DiP report suggests, 'the economic management system has fallen apart'.<sup>20</sup> Gripped by the vision of creating a modern Polish economy, the leadership was giving approval seemingly to any project that sounded ambitious and imaginative. It was particularly easy to get support for 'cooperation with the West' and for building up whole new industries. More mundane improvements in existing facilities, such as the railways, were pushed into the background.

Not only was nobody free to criticise these decisions at the time, but 'even those persons who arranged purchases of licences and machinery, those who spent this borrowed money, did not know the figures'<sup>21</sup> on the level of international debt. That was another issue that was kept very quiet. Credits were hardly mentioned as a reason for the economy's success in the early 1970s – it was apparently mostly due to the leadership's correct policy – and one former government minister claimed in May 1981 that he had been sacked in 1976 for

voicing concern at the high level of borrowing. This meant that the only information easily available to professional economists, let alone the mass of the population, was that Western banks were still prepared to lend. That sounded like a vote of confidence in the Polish economy.

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that Gierek's economic strategy was widely believed to be broadly correct. Despite difficulties with food and some other goods, it did seem that the economy was developing. One criticism of Gomulka's growth strategy had been that its forced austerity could hardly encourage any enthusiasm from young people. Gierek, for a time, was able to inspire much more confidence as he talked of approaching the living standards of the most advanced countries in the world. The fact that many people believed, of course, meant that later disillusionment was all the more shattering.

In fact, certain elements of the strategy definitely were correct, such as the determination to open up contacts with the advanced capitalist countries. This had been very difficult during the 1950s due partly to the West's attitude. The socialist countries, however, also underestimated the need for international contacts. Only in the mid-1960s did Poland begin to seek Western technology to overcome the serious backwardness of many sectors of industry.

As was pointed out in Chapter 3, there are strong arguments that this problem is partly due to inefficiencies in socialist economies. It is, however, quite wrong to suggest that importing technology is purely a *substitute* for failures in the domestic economy. That is only part of the explanation as it would be impossible for any country to master all new techniques alone. There is too large a chance element in their discovery. *All* the advanced countries are therefore heavily dependent on importing technology. In Japanese engineering 36% of innovations are based on licences. In the USA the figure is 28%.<sup>22</sup>

During 1976 the socialist countries imported 2,400 patents, worth \$300m, and sold to the capitalist countries 700, worth only \$40m and almost half coming from Czechoslovakia. That does indicate a serious weakness in the economies of Eastern Europe where considerable resources are devoted to research. Nevertheless, the problem of technological backwardness could never be overcome without an expansion of contacts with the West. They had, in Gierek's words, to pursue an 'active' policy of foreign trade. The objective was not just to import technology. The ultimate aim was to reach the peak level in certain sectors.

Contacts took a number of forms, but there was no direct investment by multi-national companies. The greatest hopes were attached to what is described as 'industrial co-operation'. In its most advanced form this involves long-term agreements between firms in which they retain their independence but work together sharing their knowledge on specific projects. It has been suggested that this is the only way to close the technological gap. Reliance on buying licences is likely to leave the purchaser seven or eight years behind.

In practice disappointingly few of these agreements have been signed by Western firms with Polish enterprises. Moreover, they have generally been short-term contracts for the production of a single item to detailed specifications. The Polish side is therefore not involved in developing the product, but they do gain as this has often been the only way to find a market in the West for the products of their manufacturing industries.

The arrangement was judged to be beneficial for the Western firms because Poland could offer a cheap and disciplined labour force. Nevertheless, they seem often to have been disappointed with the results largely because of the poor quality of the goods produced. This has been blamed on the chronic shortages of so many goods which has meant that Polish industry has never been forced to bother too much about quality. Domestic customers have to accept anything they can get.

Disappointments in this field have meant that the main vehicle for modernising industry has been the purchase of licences. As with other forms of cooperation, Poland was slower than some of its neighbours to take advantage of the possibilities. In 1976 only 4½% of industrial production was accounted for by licences. The average level for an advanced capitalist country is 10-15%. In less developed ones it tends to be much higher.

There seem to have been exaggerated hopes as to what this could achieve. It had apparently been the starting point for Japan's success. Today, however, it depends on getting the licences into operation very quickly and then using them as a basis for further development. Neither of these proved easy. The investment cycle did seem to have been shortened considerably in the early 1970s, but it was still too long. On average already in 1976 – before the worst effects of over-investment were being felt – it was taking 2½-3 years from the time the licence was bought to the start of production: 2 years was reckoned to be the absolute maximum. Moreover, it was usually necessary to import equipment and substantial quantities of materials because

Polish industry could not cope with the new demands.

Two examples can illustrate the problem. The Fiat 125 licence was bought in 1969. The model was already old by then. No significant improvements were made and the production ceiling was only reached in 1977. Chances of significant sales in Western Europe were by then minimal. It was used as the basis for the first ever car made only in Poland, the Polonez launched in 1978. This obviously represented a great achievement, but aspects of the mechanical design were backward by world standards.

Despite these shortcomings, the development of the motor car industry was generally regarded as a reasonable success. One of the most notorious failures was the tractor industry. By 1970 the Ursus factory was producing 40,000 tractors every year. There had been co-operation with Czechoslovakia, but the relationship had been a difficult one. There was therefore a strong desire to look elsewhere and it seemed that Renault were very impressed with Ursus tractors and expressed an interest in genuine industrial co-operation.<sup>23</sup>

Despite this the government decided to buy a complete licence for a foreign tractor. The decision came before parliament where it was criticised in a powerful and emotional speech by Professor Jerzy Bukowski. He argued that it amounted to abandoning much of the development work already undertaken and, even more important, that there could be serious problems with licences. It might not be easy for Polish industry to adapt to the requirements and technical norms of another country.

Jaroszewicz rejected these criticisms on the grounds that there was no other way to reach an annual output of 100,000 tractors in a few years. He claimed that buying a licence amounted to buying time for the modernisation of agriculture. Unfortunately parliament was in no position to conduct its own enquiry which would have revealed the extent of the doubts within Ursus about the government's policy. Instead, with a minimum of delay an agreement was signed in 1974 with the British firm, Massey-Ferguson-Perkins. The aim was an output of 59,000 of the older models plus 75,000 of the new one in 1980 with 90% of its components produced in Poland. In practice only about 1,500 were produced and most of the components and materials had to be imported. Instead of buying time the purchase of the licence left Poland with a large debt and nothing to show for it. The price of imported components alone was higher than the price of a whole tractor that could be bought from Czechoslovakia.

The full explanation for this failure is still unclear. It seems that

two factors were important. The first was construction problems due to the shortages of building materials during the post-1973 investment drive. Although Ursus was regarded as a major priority and given preference in the allocation of resources, there were some delays with building the new factory space.

A more serious problem was the failure of factories to supply components. A tractor is a highly complex machine and over a hundred different firms were to be involved in the whole production process. In the event, hardly any of them were willing to supply Ursus. Some simply did not have the capacity – they were suffering from delays in investment projects – and it was, of course, impossible to treat them all as priorities. It seems, however, that many others were unable to meet the demanding quality standards. A major problem, but not the only one, was that British tractors used measurements in inches while the whole of the Polish engineering industry uses metric measures.

There were a number of other highly questionable investment projects. By the autumn of 1980 the Polish press was giving details of factories that had been bought without checking that there were people to build them, or power to run them, or that there was anyone at home or abroad who would want to buy their products, or that the terms of the contract were good. Spurred on by Gierek's 'propaganda of success', those responsible had paid out large quantities of foreign currency for factories that would never be of any use. Even those that were working had still not enabled them to close the technological gap across industry as a whole. The full picture was revealed in a government report published in the summer of 1981. It showed that total export earnings from the licences purchased in the 1970s were barely above the import costs. These included the purchase of the licences and of equipment and materials.

This was a big disappointment. The hope had been that rising exports of manufactured goods to the West could create a balance of payments surplus with which to pay off debts. Instead, it could not even counterbalance the need to increase imports of agricultural produce and the need to pay higher prices for oil.

This meant that, once agriculture was hit by the bad harvest of 1979, industrial output began to drop too. There were inadequate resources available for vital imports so that it suffered its first ever decline in socialist Poland, a drop of 2% in 1979.

## NOTES

1. G. Blazynski, *Flashpoint Poland* (New York, 1979), p.7. This book contains a mass of useful information on the Gierek period.
2. See the account by Z. Pelczynski in Bromke and Strong, op. cit.
3. Quotes from Gierek are from addresses to the Central Committee on 20 December 1970 and 6 February 1971.
4. See his article in Bromke and Strong, op. cit.
5. Quoted in Blazynski, op. cit., p.109.
6. Reproduced in *Dissent in Poland* (London, 1977).
7. Experience and Future, p.105.
8. L. Dembinski (of the Catholic University of Lublin) in Bromke and Strong, op. cit., p.182.
9. Jezierski and Petz, op. cit., p.338 and Karpinski, op. cit., p.58.
10. Reproduced in *Dissent in Poland*.
11. Experience and Future, p.26. That book contains the first two of the reports.
12. T. Zukowski, 'Krótka historia rad robotniczych (3)', *Polityka*, 8 August 1981.
13. Kalecki, *Introduction*, p.46.
14. Experience and Future, p.47.
15. Experience and Future, p.24.
16. Z. Wojakiewicz, *ABC dekady 1971-1980* (Katowice, 1979), p.23.
17. Experience and Future, p.24.
18. ibid., p.34.
19. ibid., p.30.
20. ibid., p.42.
21. ibid., p.24.
22. J. Nowicki, *Import myśli naukowo-technicznej z rozwiniętych krajów kapitalistycznych* (Warsaw, 1978), p.90. Information on expanding contacts with the West is also taken from A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Kooperacja przemysłowa Polski z rozwiniętymi krajami kapitalistycznymi* (Warsaw, 1980), p.65, and E. Zaleski, 'Technology transfer between East and West' in *Economic and Financial Aspects of East-West Cooperation* (Vienna, 1979).
23. This account relies heavily on L. Bojko, 'Traktor na wirazu', *Polityka*, 20 September 1980.

## 5 The Strikes and the Deepening Crisis

### *The workers speak*

By the beginning of 1980 Poland faced the seemingly impossible task of repaying its enormous debt while also satisfying the domestic population. Shortages were spreading to an ever-increasing range of goods, including cars, furniture and babies' clothes. However, the most serious case was food. It was predicted by the government that the quantity of meat supplied to the market would be 25% below the level of demand. That meant a doubling of the shortfall over the 1978 level. Inevitably, queuing would take up a large part of people's time and many would go away empty handed. In fact, a lot of people at that time were *never* able to buy meat in the shops. They depended on elderly relatives who could spend the equivalent of a working day searching for goods in short supply.

The Christmas rush in 1979 was particularly chaotic. Wyszynski, in his Christmas message, was strongly critical of the government's economic failures, but he blamed it on their inability to cope rather than any bad intent. He praised the Polish people for their forebearance and urged them to 'forgive' those responsible.

This was the background to the party's Eighth Congress held in February 1980. Far from initiating 'an hour of truth' and a bold programme of reform, it produced no serious assessment of what had gone wrong. Although there was reported to be a lot of very strong criticism in the pre-congress discussion, it seems not to have changed, or added to, Gierek's ideas in any significant way. At the congress itself there was plenty of the usual criticism of unnamed incompetent officials who had apparently contributed to the economic difficulties, but there was no questioning of his assertion that the principal blame for undeniable difficulties lay with problems in the world economy and almost all the speakers explicitly praised him.

The most striking outcome of the congress was in fact the consolidation of Gierek's position. He managed to remove from the Political Bureau Olszowski who could have been a rival for Gierek's post and was said to have presented a highly critical – but inevitably

unpublished – report on the leadership's economic policies. Jaroszewicz, the Prime Minister, also lost his job and could be seen as a partial scapegoat for the difficulties. He was replaced by Gierek's close friend Babiuch. Strictly speaking this decision was taken by parliament, but it was rightly assumed that it would be unanimous after Gierek's recommendation.

Parliamentary elections shortly afterwards seemed to pass off just as easily. No opposition candidates were allowed. Some were proposed by the Confederation of Independent Poland, but their candidatures were rejected. Leaflets were also distributed calling for people to exercise their right not to vote, but the results were even better for the regime than in 1976. Almost 99% voted and over 99½% of those supported the official candidates.

This cannot possibly be a serious indication of the level of public confidence in the government and shows very clearly how little credibility can be attached to the results of uncontested elections.

This, however, was never going to be the real test for the new government. Having ruled out other changes, Babiuch was to stand or fall on his ability to start solving the economic problems. He could have won some small measure of credibility as he began cautiously to advocate economic reforms to improve industrial efficiency. Before significant progress could be made, however, he was faced with the most serious difficulties Poland had encountered over raising further loans.

There therefore had to be a cutback in imports and a redirection of all available industrial capacity towards exporting. The effect was to accentuate still further domestic shortages. On purely economic grounds the case for a sharp rise in meat prices was overwhelming. Demand far exceeded supply while the prices were held down below the cost of production by an enormous government subsidy that was approaching the equivalent of 5% of national income.

Although low food prices had been seen as an egalitarian measure and as one of the benefits of socialism, they must ultimately lead to absurdities. The best known was the case of farmers who were finding it cheaper to feed animals on heavily subsidised bread rather than fodder. The low meat price inevitably meant that low prices were paid to the farmers. As a result they were uninterested in livestock which had to be maintained on the *state* farms. The absurdity of this is that large farms are at their best for grain production, which is easily mechanised, but at their worst for livestock.

On 1 July 1980 the first steps were taken towards raising the price

of meat. It was done as quietly as possible without any major public discussion or attempt to explain what was happening. The first official announcement came on the next day when it was claimed that only 2% of meat being sold was affected.

The key to this was the existence of 'commercial' shops which had been established after the failure to raise meat prices in 1976. Their prices were roughly twice the level of the ordinary shops, but they provided a rapid service to those who had the money to pay extra to avoid queueing. In 1977 they had accounted for under 1% of sales, but their share grew to 8% in 1978 and 18% in 1979.

This had appeared to the government to be a simple and politically feasible means of moving towards market equilibrium, but it had caused deep public resentment. There was a widespread belief that inequalities had *increased* during the 1970s, although, figures on personal incomes do not show much change. Nevertheless, special shops were precisely the sort of measure that made inequalities all the easier to see. They indicated sharp and clear stratification of society that had nothing in common with generally accepted ideas of what a socialist society should be like. As one respondent in the DiP report proclaimed, 'inequality and injustice are everywhere'.<sup>1</sup>

The government, however, hoped that its decision on 1 July to restrict certain sorts of meat, including boneless beef, to special shops would not lead to a major outburst of discontent.

The transfer of meat to commercial shops had been greater during the previous year. The overall price increase was therefore less than had been achieved in 1979. Nevertheless, it proved to be the last straw for the Polish working class. There were strikes the next day starting at the Ursus factory. This time the workers did not demand the retraction of the price increases. Neither were there violent scenes with workers demonstrating their anger on the streets. Instead, they behaved with great discipline staying in the factories and electing representatives who pressed for wage increases and negotiated directly with their own management.

This was made possible by an instruction from above – in line with the broadly defined 'strategy of manouevre' – that managers were to take a conciliatory attitude. They were to concede what they could as quickly as they could in the hope that this would stop the strikes from spreading. In the event wage increases of up to 15% were granted and there were clear promises that there would be no victimisation of the worker's representatives. The government also stepped in quickly with reserve meat supplies that could help defuse discontent.

Had these wage increases been repeated throughout the whole economy the effect would have been to *worsen* the market disequilibrium. The government, however, hoped to contain the strike wave quickly and censored all news reports of what was happening. It was also made clear, in a major speech by Gierek, that there could be no justification for higher wages unless backed up by higher productivity.

In the event news of the strikes did spread. Personal contacts played a role but the most important factor was KOR. It had links with workers throughout the country and could keep them informed directly. It could also provide information to Western reporters which then came back into the country via newspapers and foreign radio broadcasts. Enough people were in touch with these sources of information for the news to spread.

The government's conciliatory attitude, alongside the sheer depth of public disillusionment, could not stem the movement. By the middle of July there was effectively a general strike in Lublin. The workers demanded wage increases, with the most going to the lowest paid and they also came out against special privileges for the police and army, against the existence of commercial shops and against the censorship of the press. They did not call for independent trade unions and the strike was not co-ordinated by a committee linking together all the factories involved. It was therefore possible for Deputy Prime Minister Jagielski to negotiate with each factory individually and the strike was ended with concessions on wages and promises to investigate other grievances.<sup>2</sup>

Over the following weeks there were strikes in public services in Warsaw and, although the government did hold out for longer in some cases, wage increases were granted. This was the situation when the strike began in the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk on Thursday 14 August. The initial issues were wages and the victimisation of Anna Walentynowicz, a crane operator who had been prominent in the strike in January 1971. She had become active in the Committee for Free Trade Unions of the (Baltic) Coast which had been formed in May 1978 by a small group of activists who were to play a central role in giving direction to the Gdansk strike. They produced their own news bulletin and their initial declaration condemned the official unions in simplistic and analytically inaccurate terms as 'a subordinate instrument for the organised exploitation of all social groups by the ruling Communist Party'.<sup>3</sup> Their main activity, however, was publicising workers' grievances and, in January 1980,

Anna Walentynowicz was victimised following an attempt to commemorate the dead of December 1970. She was transferred to work outside Gdansk, which was tantamount to dismissal. A small protest strike won a management commitment to review the situation, but she was finally dismissed on 9 August.

In the new atmosphere created by successful strikes elsewhere, her friends prepared for action with leaflets and posters. The response was immediately sympathetic. Workers saw it as an opportunity to make their voice heard on the incompetence and corruption of the government and to settle accounts on outstanding grievances from the past.

At this point Walesa made his presence felt. He had been a member of the strike committee in December 1970 and was elected to the workers' council shortly afterwards. He was sacked in 1976 after making a highly critical speech and became involved in the movement for free trade unions. Shortly after the start of the strike he climbed over the shipyard wall and was soon elected chairman of the strike committee.

Negotiations proceeded quickly and the management agreed on the first day to reinstate previously victimised workers and to build a monument to the dead of 1970. On the Saturday night they also granted a massive wage increase.

At this the strike committee called for a return to work, but Lech Walesa, after announcing the decision, was confronted with a new mood of militancy. He realised 'that an important number are for a continuation of the strike in solidarity with the workers in other enterprises, where the management had not even been prepared to make a promise'.<sup>4</sup> The strike had already spread to the Paris Commune shipyard in Gdynia and thence to all the other shipyards in the area and on to the docks, public transport and enterprises connected with shipbuilding. Their action would clearly be weakened once the biggest factory in the area had returned to work. Walesa was immediately sympathetic to this view and cancelled the decision to end the strike.

That night, representatives of the striking factories met in the shipyard and elected the MKS, the Interfactory Strike Committee. Walesa became the chairman and it began to work out its demands, which included the right to form new, independent trade unions, and it made a firm commitment that no factory would accept separate negotiations with the government.

On Monday more factories joined the strike in the Gdansk area. It

also spread to Szczecin, where workers' suspicions were aroused when, on Saturday, 'with no apparent reason the entire work-force was given a 10% pay rise'.<sup>5</sup> On the Monday morning many shipyard workers stopped work and demanded a meeting with the director. He was unwilling or unable to answer their questions about the demands of the Gdansk workers, and the strike very quickly spread through the shipyard. In the next few days it was joined by many more factories. As elsewhere a very prominent role was played by young workers who felt they had less to lose should they be victimised afterwards. Feeling was so strong that there seemed to be no need for agitation. In some cases there were reports of the party secretary, or even of the director, initiating the strike. A joint strike committee was formed in which a third of the Presidium were party members — a higher proportion than in Gdansk — and the majority were representatives in the official unions.

The party leadership's response was to try to negotiate with each factory separately. They did not recognise the Gdansk MKS and they attacked its demands and motives. Free trade unions were apparently irrelevant to the workers' needs and were intended as a platform for anti-socialist activities. The bitterest attack came in Gdansk from Szydlak who had been appointed trade union leader earlier in the year after previously being Deputy Prime Minister. His election, needless to say, was decided on not by trade union members but by Gierek. Even the party committee in the town were 'critical of the speech made by comrade J. Szydlak', while workers' exasperation was such that, as announced by the MKS on 20 August, they began resigning from the old unions en masse.

Over the following days the authorities tried to isolate the Gdansk strike by cutting off all telephone contacts. The police began to harrass strike leaders and prominent activists in KOR were arrested. Under the law they could only be held for 48 hours without a charge under very special circumstances. In practice they were held until the end of the strike. The belief seems to have been that they were a major influence on the strikes. They probably did play a very important role in spreading information and the existence of uncensored news sheets had helped a small number of activists to develop their ideas over the preceding period. Nevertheless, they were certainly not the inspiration for the strikes which is to be found in the deep disillusionment of the mass of the working people.

The most prominent KOR activists did advocate peaceful occupations and they welcomed the demand for free trade unions but,

again, both of those points found a very enthusiastic response from the mass of workers and followed logically from the post-war experience of the Polish working class.

The media carried no truthful reports on what was happening. It was only after the Lublin strike that hints began to appear of major industrial disruption. With the spread of the Gdansk strike the press and television launched a major propaganda campaign.

It was argued that irresponsible, anarchic and anti-socialist groups were exploiting discontent for their own ends. The strikes were only worsening the economic situation and, even more serious, they were endangering the very existence of the Polish state.

The authorities even tried to use a statement from Wyszyński on 22 August to encourage a return to work. It was, however, assumed in Gdansk that the official media were giving a distorted account. This was partly true. The church did not actively support strike action, but it was also critical of the government and generally supported some of the workers' demands. It was continuing with its established strategy of neither clearly supporting nor clearly opposing the authorities.

None of this could break the resolve of the strikers. An opinion poll published in *Polityka* on 13 September showed that only a small minority of the population really believed that Poland was 'only one step from disaster'. Only one, out of the 500 people questioned, thought that the strikers were to blame for the crisis. Very few blamed management, while almost three quarters pointed an accusatory finger at the country's top leadership. Moreover, many especially of the younger manual workers spoke with pride at having participated in the strikes.

Under these circumstances the government's representatives soon had to accept that they could not negotiate with separate factories. Barcikowski in Szczecin began talks with the joint strike committee on Friday 22 August, but in Gdansk the workers refused to talk until telephone links with the rest of the country were restored. That was conceded a few days later, but there had already been contacts between the two strike centres and they were agreed that the most important demand was independent trade unions. Only if this was granted would they have the means to keep up the pressure on the government to ensure that it finally had to keep its promises.

Gierek, however, hoped to be able to avoid this. At the PUWP Central Committee on 24 August he announced major changes in the leadership and admitted that serious mistakes had been made. He accepted some responsibility but did not resign. Critics had apparently

been ignored and they were now to be brought into leading positions. Szydlak was removed and Prime Minister Babiuch was replaced by Pinkowski. Olszowski was also brought back into the leadership. These were significant changes, but they could hardly restore workers' confidence in the leadership. In both 1956 and 1970 there had been bigger changes and the new leaders had promised to do better than their predecessors. With that experience behind them workers were no longer impressed by changes of personnel only. They were demanding a more fundamental change that would assure them of a permanent influence on major policy decisions.

Gierek appeared to go some way towards this with an acceptance that there should be immediate trade union elections by secret ballot and with no limit to the number of candidates. Even that, however, had been promised before. To end a strike on such terms would have meant leaving the initiative in the authorities' hands as they could still delay the elections. Moreover, elections were only granted for plants where the workforce somehow expressed a desire for them. The outcome could have been delays, argument, no full re-election of trade union committees and no change in the unions' top leadership. The Polish workers were experienced enough to have no interest in bodies that had failed them so totally before. They stuck to the demand for completely new unions.

On 26 August, with telephone links restored, Jagielski arrived in the shipyard to start negotiations. Relations between the two sides were eased by the presence of 'experts'. On the workers' side the idea originated when a number of intellectuals came with a collective message of support. They were persuaded to stay to help in the negotiations. They often knew the government's experts from professional contacts and found that even they were somewhat critical of past policies as was almost everyone. According to one participant, the discussions were so friendly that it often seemed that there were not two sides at all.<sup>6</sup>

This, however, was not enough to persuade the government to give in. Jagielski proceeded slowly and annoyed the strikers by the generality of his statements. He infuriated them by claiming to be ignorant when confronted with complaints about the tone of anti-strike propaganda and about police harassment and arrests. He denied knowledge of the existence of political prisoners, although it was believed that a number of the regime's opponents had been imprisoned on fabricated evidence of normal criminal activities. Most importantly of all, he side-stepped the key issue of trade unions.

The credibility of his position was further undermined by the publication in the strike bulletin *Solidarnosc* of a leaked document produced by the Ideology and Education Department of the Central Committee and sent to the Gdansk party authorities on 28 August. It expressed the view that 'free trade unions' were an idea of 'individuals closely linked to the anti-communist centres in the West' who 'are directed and funded by these centres which are the main forces that want free trade unions'. Their aim was apparently to create 'a situation of dual power' while bankrupting the economy through continual pressure for impossible demands.

There was, of course, no mention of the years of failure before or of the vast accumulation of justifiable grievances. It was not difficult for the strikers' bulletin to answer these points and the more general flood of hostile propaganda. They were particularly unimpressed by 'every allusion, more or less clear, to the anxiety of our allies and to the possible consequences of our action in the international sphere.' These were described as 'an offence to our allies and to our whole society' which were only serving 'the interests of a small group of evil-minded people'. As they emphasised, there was no intention of putting in question either 'the foundations of the socialist regime in our country' or 'its position in international relations'. Anyone with such intentions, the bulletin's editors insisted, would be opposed by them.

In fact, they thought that Poland's allies ought to *welcome* attempts to improve the working of the economy which the strikers saw as the key to improving the conditions of life. This, they argued, required fundamental reforms in the system of planning and the way the economy was run. That, however, was only possible with 'a programme which includes our participation in decisions' and a 'generalised system of information'.

That was a broad argument for democratisation of economic decisions. The key to it all was said to be the creation of independent trade unions because that and that alone would ensure that workers no longer had to accept 'the scorn of those who are what they are solely thanks to the labour of the workers'. Only by guaranteeing 'our right to a dialogue' could it be ensured that the government had 'to hear the authentic voice of the working class, and not just the echo of its own words'.

These arguments might have been powerful, but the decisive factor was the strength and unity of the strikers. During the second week the whole Baltic coast was paralysed and there were sympathy strikes throughout the country. The final blow was the strike by Silesian

miners. They took up the demand for independent trade unions, but they had a number of grievances of their own.

In an effort to alleviate the economy's difficulties, the government had tried to step up coal production. This meant – as in the early 1950s – demanding longer working hours including compulsory Sundays and stiff penalties for a day's absence.

News about mining accidents was strictly censored whenever possible and Poland produced no aggregate figures of deaths at work. There had been some complaints about the effects on workers' health of these long hours, and they were publicised by KOR, but the miners were still slow to strike in 1980. During earlier upheavals they seem to have remained quiet. Better pay and better living conditions were the obvious reasons. It is also argued that a lot of miners were party members or sympathisers who, like Gierek, came back to Poland from France or Belgium. When they did finally strike the movement began in the new town of Jastrzebie where a lot of the miners had only recently come to Silesia. It spread quickly in the last days of August and an MKS was formed linking together mines, factories, schools and other enterprises even including a beauty salon. It seemed clear that the regime had no support at all in the working class. All their propaganda had failed. Jagielski then quickly reached agreement with the Gdansk strikers' even acceding to their insistence that the imprisoned KOR activists should be released.

Agreements were finally signed in Szczecin on 30 August and in Gdansk on the following day.<sup>7</sup> There were some differences between them but the Gdansk agreement was generally the more comprehensive. It took the form of comments on 21 demands that had been drawn up on 23 August.

The first and most important, the right to form independent unions, was granted with some qualifications. They were not to play the role of a political party, they were to accept the social ownership of the means of production and the system of international alliances. More controversially, there was formal recognition for the party's leading role in the state. This was not mentioned in the Szczecin agreement, which referred more generally to the unions having 'a socialist character in harmony with the constitution', and fears were soon being expressed that it could enable the authorities to claim the right to impose the *nomenklatura* system on the new unions. It seems that the phrase was slipped in by the 'experts' and its possible implications were not fully appreciated until afterwards.

Despite these restrictions, the new unions were to be given wide

powers. They were able to express opinions on the shares of national income going to investment and consumption, on the particular sectors to be expanded the most, on pay and price policies and on long-term planning of the economy. The right to strike was also to be guaranteed in a new trade union law.

Two other important political demands were granted. One was for the observation of the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech, of the press and of publication. The radio, television and the press were 'to offer expression to different points of view' and, to ensure this, they were to be brought 'under the control of society'. An important step towards this was to be a new press law presented within three months. Censorship was to be reduced, but some control was judged to be essential in the interests of state security, of international alliances, to prevent offence to religious believers and non-believers and to eliminate publications which offend against morality. The church was to be given greater freedom, starting with the weekly broadcasting of mass over the radio.

It is hard to imagine what possible justification there could have been for not allowing this before. It appears as a remarkably petty restriction depriving a minority of housebound people of contact with religion. It was, in fact, one of the few aspects of the Gdansk agreement that was implemented reasonably quickly.

The other major political concession was the agreement to release political prisoners: three were named in the agreement itself owing to the government delegation's disbelief that any existed in Poland. There was to be full rehabilitation for those victimised after the events of 1970 and 1976, and for students victimised by expulsion from their places of study.

These demands came first, indicating the strikers' awareness of the political roots of the crisis and hence of the need for a political solution.

They also demanded an end to privileges for the police, the army and party officials and insisted that appointments were to be based on merit alone. They placed great emphasis on the need for an economic reform involving greater independence for enterprises and genuine worker participation in decision making. Proposals on this were to be presented within a few months. It was a very clear demonstration of the workers' awareness of the need to solve the crisis in the whole economy if they were to enjoy higher living standards. Wage demands alone would have been of little value. It also indicated how far times had changed since 1970 as workers' representatives were taking up

the sort of demands that had once been the domain of a few critical intellectuals.

There was also a long list of economic demands. There was to be a flat rate wage increase, of 2,000 zl, which meant about 40% of average earnings and was apparently to compensate for past price increases. There was also a guarantee of no cut in living standards. The government agreed to aim for balance on the market for food: that meant minimising exports of meat and alleviating shortages with imports. A ration system was to be introduced and the special commercial shops abolished.

In view of the actual economic situation, some of these demands were simply unrealistic. It was, in fact, accepted that the wage rises could not be implemented at once, but the government had still signed an agreement implying that workers would not have to make major sacrifices. It did insist that the demand for retirement at 50 for women and 55 for men was simply impossible and agreement could not be reached on pension increases. It did, however, agree to very detailed proposals on how to improve the health service: these had been raised by health workers who argued that a better service depended on bringing their pay and conditions up to the level of other workers.

Proposals were to be worked out quickly on improving nursery facilities to help working women and on raising maternity leave to three years so that mothers could look after their own young children. A programme was to be worked out quickly on how to cut the waiting time for houses and family allowances were to rise in 1981. There was also a commitment to aim for a five-day working week.

A number of these points were still only agreed in general terms. The view was taken that details could be sorted out later with the independent trade unions playing a major role in the discussions. Nevertheless, they give no support to the attempts by various Western leaders, such as President Reagan, to claim a common philosophy with the Gdansk strikes. The emphasis was very clearly on *expanding* social services and on the *state* taking full responsibility for improving people's lives. The demands, in fact, reflected very precisely the failings of the existing model of socialism, but were in no sense a criticism of socialism in general.

Workers in Szczecin evidently viewed things in a very similar way. In Jastrzebie the strike continued until an agreement was signed on 3 September guaranteeing that the 21 points agreed in Gdansk applied throughout the country. The miners also presented a number of demands of their own. They were not insisting on a blanket wage

increase, although they did want adherence to stipulated 'maximum and minimum wages with a deadline for implementation of 1 January 1981'. Their main concern was with conditions and working hours and their major achievement was agreement that there was to be no compulsory working on free days and that all Saturdays and Sundays would be free from 1 January 1981.

### *The economy plunges*

After these agreements had been signed there was a strangely euphoric atmosphere on *both* sides. On the workers' side there was 'a great burst of hope. People believed that things could be better, that there was sense in a joint struggle, in democracy and self management, that there was sense in genuine social involvement. And that potential of power and human energy is a very great strength. It is the guarantee that the agreements will be kept to'.<sup>8</sup>

From the government side too there were grounds for relief. Despite the bitterness of the dispute, agreement had been reached and nobody had resorted to physical violence. That in itself seemed to be a real achievement. The hope was that the same approach could be continued into the future providing a basis for solving Poland's serious problems.

Jan Glowczyk, editor of the economic weekly *Zycie gospodarcze*, had participated in the Szczecin negotiations. He left no doubt of the extent of his emotional involvement. In his view the agreement showed just how much *united* the two sides. He looked forward to the development of a 'programme for the development of socialist democracy and a programme for getting out of the economic crisis'. Economic reform, as proposed in the Gdansk agreement, was to be an essential part of this. It could not be put off any longer as there was now a real chance to involve workers in management.

Some papers began referring to a 'social contract' which would set the broad terms for working class participation in solving the economic problems. The implication of that idea was that the new unions would be so satisfied with a certain say in economic policies that they would be prepared to exert discipline over their own members. It would have meant a significant change in the political structure, and probably enough to prevent a repetition of some of the worst blunders of the past.

In practice, however, the early euphoria was not followed by social peace. Poland was gripped by periodically mounting tensions and was

several times on the brink of a general strike. Militancy, distrust and hostility were the dominant attitudes from the working class. For their part, the government and party leadership proved quite incapable of finding an approach that could win back public confidence.

Their failure was due partly to the nature of the economic crisis which meant that there was not the slightest chance of fulfilling the promises of the Gdansk agreement. Even more serious was the unwillingness of the authorities to initiate significant reforms until confronted with strike action.

Far from righting itself, the economic crisis worsened at an alarming rate. Industrial production fell again in 1980 and then a catastrophic decline began. In mid-1981 it was almost 15% below the level of the previous year. Government leaders had to admit that they had not expected this disaster and that, for as far as they could see into the future, things were only going to get worse. They could no longer hope for relief from the completion of projects under construction which had to be frozen as the authorities battled to use all available resources to prevent a further collapse in current production.

The root of the trouble was still the foreign debt. Debts could not be repaid even before the strikes, but difficulties were far more serious by the autumn of 1980. A bad harvest led to the need for more imports of agricultural produce. The strikes caused some loss of production, but the agreement reached in Jastrzebie made things much worse. By cutting working hours it led to an immediate decline in coal output and that led to a staggering 62% drop in the amount exported with catastrophic consequences for foreign currency earnings as coal had accounted for 15-20% of exports.

In March 1981 Poland had to admit that it could no longer meet obligations to its creditors and there was then no chance of significant further loans. The effects soon reverberated throughout the economy. There was no alternative to savage cuts in imports of raw materials and components. Already suffering from shortages of energy, the output from a number of big factories started to decline quite dramatically. Disruption then spread rapidly so that, in May 1981, production of cars was 26% below the level of the previous year. For televisions, cigarettes and mining machinery the decline was 19%. For tractors it was 14%. Shoe output was 13% below the previous year's level while housing completions were running 34% behind the average for 1980.

Inevitably, the lack of a few vital raw materials meant that some

factories had to close down completely. There was much talk about the spectre of unemployment. One prediction was that there could be a million out of work by the end of the year and there seemed to be no prospect of jobs for about a quarter of that summer's school leavers. There were in fact, reports of workers being put on 'indefinite unpaid leave', but a lot of factories were still recruiting workers. They apparently needed a *larger* labour force to cope with the difficulties created by shortages of raw materials. There was also a fear of dismissing good workers because, should the economy pick up again quickly, they might be difficult to replace. The surprising outcome of this was that statistics produced in the autumn of 1981 still showed a substantial surplus of vacancies over job seekers and the government was promising jobs or training courses for all school leavers by the end of the year.

Nevertheless, the decline in production could only accentuate the shortages. Average monthly earnings at the start of 1981 were 19% above the level of the previous year. There was far more money chasing far fewer goods and the imbalance was steadily worsening as people had to store up the money they could not spend. Inevitably, shortages affected the full range of consumer goods. Butter, sugar and meat were rationed. Chocolate was available in exchange for ration coupons only for those with children. Meat rationing, however, did for a time ease one of the most notorious shortages. People who had not even seen meat in shops for years could finally hope to find some, albeit after some searching and queuing. Moreover, although the commercial shops did disappear, it was available again in the private peasant markets at four times the official price.

Other goods, however, disappeared completely. Finding beer was an exceptional achievement. Matches and cigarettes might turn up every few days. A new car required payment in advance by instalments. Delivery was 'guaranteed' within ten years although the value of such a guarantee was unclear. The order of priority for immediate delivery was decided by a lottery.

All this should not be exaggerated. Poles were certainly not starving, but daily life was filled with frustrations and annoyances. It certainly did not live up to the expectations encouraged during the Gierek period. To restore approximate balance in the consumer goods market would apparently have required a general price increase of 30-40% in early 1981. By the middle of the year, as the full extent of the drop in production became obvious, a figure of over 60% was being suggested. In July, the Prime Minister claimed a general doubling of

prices would not even have been enough.

Under such circumstances, discontent could hardly be avoided. There was, however, an even more worrying fact. The economy's long-term prospects were being threatened by difficulties with exports. The extent and consequences of chaos in industry were illustrated by stories of Western businessmen running from one Ministry to another begging for someone to ensure the production of the goods they had ordered.

This was the most frightening feature of the economic crisis. Unlike the difficulties in the 1950s there was no reason to believe that, given time and an adjustment in economic policies, everything could be solved. This time the failure to produce exports was restricting the ability to import which was itself leading to a further decline in production and hence in exports. The prospect was for a continuing decline culminating in Poland being declared in default. Should that stage ever be reached, then Poland might be unable to trade with the West at all. Most of the industry would then be faced with closure.

This horrific outcome obviously had to be avoided. It would be regarded as the final ignominy for a country that once played a major role in European affairs. It would also be a disaster for the banks that have lent money to Poland as there would then be no chance at all of their debts being repaid. They were therefore prepared to reschedule debts and defer interest payments, but they were not willing to offer further loans on the scale required to allow a full recovery in Polish industry.

Other socialist countries reluctantly accepted that Poland could not keep to its international agreements especially in terms of coal exports

TABLE 6

Polish imports and exports in the first five months of 1980 and 1981 in millions of zloty.<sup>9</sup>

	<i>Imports</i>		<i>Exports</i>		<i>Balance</i>	
	1980	1981	1980	1981	1980	1981
Socialist countries	11421	12167	11752	9930	+331	-2238
Rest of the world	10264	8117	9465	7394	-799	-722

and the Soviet Union took the lead in giving further loans. In the year after August 1980 it lent the equivalent of \$4.2bn about a fifth of which was in convertible currency. The importance of this help is clear from the reorientation of foreign trade shown in Table 6 which also shows how far exports had declined.

About half of the drop in exports is accounted for by coal while the level for some other industrial products held up fairly well. Cars are an example: roughly a third of output went abroad in the early part of 1981. The government was obviously doing everything possible to keep up the level of foreign currency earnings, even at the expense of exacerbating shortages domestically, but they could not close the balance of payments deficit with the capitalist countries. They had to accept a 19% increase in imports of agricultural goods and a 43% drop in meat exports.

Thanks to the goodwill of other countries, the government averted the ultimate economic catastrophe. To solve their problems permanently, however, there would have to be a dramatic increase in exports and that would inevitably mean withdrawing more goods from the domestic market. That was hardly a realistic possibility. The Polish people felt they had already made big enough sacrifices and the government had continually promised to try to alleviate the shortages in basic necessities. The leadership therefore continued to hope that it could somehow stabilise production at a reasonable level and regain control of the economy. Then, provided it retained the goodwill of Poland's debtors and the harvests were not another series of disasters, there might be a gradual recovery. In the summer of 1981 the government was predicting that the economy could be back to its 1975 level before the end of the decade.

In the meantime, the deepening economic crisis inevitably caused a further loss of public confidence. The government promised an improvement in the supply situation after the strikes. This was seen as the top priority. Instead the people were enduring sacrifices that would lead to rumblings of discontent even if the country were engaged in a major war.

It hardly needs stating that everyone in Poland was fully aware of the fact that they were living through a major economic crisis. It was clearly very different from the kind of crisis we are enduring in Britain where the real hardships are imposed on the section of the population who suffer from unemployment. In Poland practically everyone is aware of the frustrating shortages and declining living standards. Nobody can be complacent.

Nevertheless, apart from a general acceptance that there was much more to the crisis than economic difficulties, there was no unanimity at all on its causes or on how it could be overcome. Many people were frankly bewildered and unable to understand – or even believe – how the dreams inspired by Gierek's promises were being shattered by the most serious economic crisis endured by any country in post-war Europe. Others, however, accepted simplistic explanations based, inevitably, on a superficial understanding of the situation. That, of course, is a very natural human reaction and it is also natural that people should be attracted to explanations that imply an easy solution.

A very popular example was the belief that corrupt party and government officials had accumulated privileges for themselves while leaving the economy to deteriorate. As a statement of fact this is true, but it has often been presented as the dominant feature of the crisis in such a way as to imply that the main burden could be borne by high earners. Unfortunately, although corruption has played a role in the crisis, privilege is simply nothing like extensive enough to provide the resources to overcome the economic difficulties.

Another appealing but inadequate argument is the belief that the Polish economy has been ruthlessly exploited by the Soviet Union. Rumours about meat shortages being due to forced exports to provide food for the Moscow Olympics were avidly lapped up. There is absolutely no hard evidence for this, but it could be given some credibility by the former policy of censoring all reports of meat exports to the USSR.

There was a real basis for complaint about the terms of trade agreements before 1956, but they are far less plausible today. The only sensible argument – albeit one that cannot possibly account for the present crisis – centres on the shipbuilding and shipping industries. Polish shipyards have been supplying large numbers of ships to the Soviet merchant fleet which has been able to earn hard currency. Poland, however, has had to buy ships and equipment from the West and this has contributed to its hard currency debt.

It would be very difficult to piece together the terms of all trade deals between Poland and the Soviet Union, but some have been extremely advantageous for Poland, such as the steady supply of cheap oil. Nevertheless, blaming the USSR fits with the suspicions engendered by years of censorship and, above all, it implies that Poles should not make major sacrifices. All that is needed is for the Soviet Union to give back what has been taken.

More generally, there is no doubt that the worsening economic

situation did accentuate popular distrust in the authorities and in the media and that made people more willing to accept simplistic and spurious explanations based on rumour and prejudice. Although the government did try to give a truthful account of the difficulties, engineering workers in Radom could insist absolutely that they had no idea what was happening because all the published information was 'falsified'. A similar attitude came from Solidarity leaders in Katowice, interviewed in *Polityka* in December 1980, who made it clear that they did not trust government figures on meat supplies and therefore could not express approval for the proposed system of rationing. Other workers insisted very forcefully that they did not believe the 'propaganda of success' before, so why should they suddenly believe the 'propaganda of disaster'? The fear was that this was just another ploy to dampen down militancy and weaken Solidarity. Even academic economists, trying to give a fair account of the situation, could be met with blank hostility. They were allegedly just saying what they were paid to say.

This attitude, of course, is largely due to the experience of three decades of lies and broken promises. It might have been possible to overcome some of the bitterness if the new unions had been welcomed from the start as a partner for the government. This did not happen.

#### *Solidarity fights for full recognition*

The deepening economic crisis really only provided a background of distrust while the main conflicts centred on the issue of democratic change. In the first place that meant formal recognition of the new unions. That, however, could never be the whole issue. The new unions had always been intended as an instrument to give the mass of the people a greater say in how the country was run. Recognition alone was therefore only the first step.

Although the government had signed the agreements in Gdansk, Szczecin and Jastrzebie, it had done so very reluctantly. It was widely feared that it still hoped to restrict the role of the new unions to such an extent that they would become totally ineffective and then lose the trust of their members. They could then either be destroyed or incorporated into the existing political system and everything would be as before.

These fears seemed to be justified by the leadership's insistence that the old unions would play a major role throughout most of the country as made clear by their decision to hold talks in September on

the economic situation excluding the Solidarity leaders. It was even more apparent from authorities in various parts of the country who tried to make Solidarity's life as difficult as possible by refusing premises and persecuting the founders and who tried to insist that the right to form independent unions was restricted only to the coast. These activities, plus delays in implementing pay increases and the refusal of access to the mass media, led to the decision to call a one hour warning strike on 3 October 1980.

The most explosive issue, however, was the registration of independent unions. The Independent Self-governing Trade Unions 'Solidarity', that being the full title for the new union representing the workers on the Baltic coast, submitted an application on September 24. During the following weeks it was strongly criticised by the official media for omitting any reference to the leading role of the party. The view had gained strength within Solidarity that it had to assert its right to be fully independent. That did not mean challenging the party's dominant position in the government: that was fully accepted. It was, however, argued that genuine independence was incompatible with a formulation that acknowledged the leadership of another body. The more the official media insisted that it had to be accepted, the more suspicious Solidarity members became that it was intended as the thin end of a wedge. It could culminate in full subordination to the *nomenklatura* system.

There were applications from other independent unions and when they too encountered difficulties with registration they announced that they were joining Solidarity. Instead of a mass of small, independent unions, the government was rapidly finding itself confronted by one, enormously powerful, nationwide organisation. Walesa was being perfectly serious when he suggested that, if forced to, they could carry on without legal recognition.

Then, on 24 October the Warsaw court approved Solidarity's application but unilaterally inserted an acknowledgement of the party's leading role. Outraged by this arbitrary act, Solidarity lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court and began preparations for strike action.

Fortunately, on 10 November, the Supreme Court accepted Solidarity's application. The leading role of the party was mentioned in an annex, as had been proposed by Walesa. That judgement, however, made the regime appear pretty silly. The official media had just been pouring out abuse about 'anti-socialist elements' who were allegedly manipulating workers into an unnecessary conflict. They

suddenly had to accept what a few days before had been totally unacceptable. Moreover, very few people doubted that the real decision had been taken by the party leadership and not by an 'independent' court. The regime was appearing as both stubbornly conservative and ultimately weak. That combination was the ideal recipe for encouraging militancy and conflict.

In fact, within a few days Poland was gripped by yet another horrendous conflict. A document prepared by the country's chief prosecutor came into the hands of the Warsaw Solidarity organisation. It contained an outline of methods used in the past to persecute political opponents and, although it contained no dramatic new ideas, its very existence could suggest that the authorities would look for a means to suppress the new unions.

During a police raid on the Solidarity office on 20 November the document was confiscated and two men were arrested and charged with betraying state secrets. The demand of freedom for the print worker Jan Naroziak was taken up by Warsaw Solidarity and his name was fly-posted throughout the city. At the same time as threatening strike action – which soon started in Ursus and a number of other factories – it began pushing for a number of additional demands. This was a typical feature of all Poland's industrial conflicts. The initial issue quickly led on to a host of other grievances which served to emphasise the extraordinary extent of disillusionment with the authorities. Access to the media was a perennial demand and this time Warsaw Solidarity added demands for a public enquiry into the activities of the police and security forces and for an investigation of who had been responsible for 'crimes against the workers' in 1970 and 1976.

The two men were released on the basis of a guarantee from Stefan Bratkowski, one of the leading forces behind the DiP group who had just been elected chairman of the journalists' union, and the authorities wisely forgot to bring them to trial. Even after that, however, workers in the Warsaw steel works went on strike. Walesa had a very difficult job persuading them not to press their criticism of the police too hard. He warned that in his opinion it could lead to an armed intervention eliminating all the gains that had been made.

Within a few weeks another major conflict was brewing over proposals to shorten the working week. The government had suggested in September that all Saturdays could be free if the working day were extended to  $8\frac{1}{2}$  hours. Alternatively, there could be a gradual increase in the number of free Saturdays. Its plan was to reach the

eight hour day and five day week in 1985. This was in line with the letter of the Gdansk and Szczecin agreements. Strictly speaking a five day week was conceded only in mining.

This view was not accepted by Solidarity. There were frequent reminders that the eight hour day had been formally granted immediately after independence in 1918. The government, however, seemed unprepared to go any further. Solidarity therefore announced that 10 January would be regarded by them as a free day. The government called on people to work insisting that the economy could not afford the cost of more paid holidays. Their view was not well received by ordinary people. It was pointed out that the economy was in an appalling mess even with longer working hours than any other socialist country. It was hard for people to accept that this change would lead to any further disaster.

In a sense this reaction was wrong as any decrease in output had to accentuate the market imbalance. Nevertheless, it was a very natural attitude in view of the government's total lack of credibility, especially in its ability to make sensible economic decisions.

As no agreement had been reached, Solidarity again called for people to stay away from work on 24 January. The media gave them no opportunity to state their case while the government's position was put very forcefully. Nevertheless, Solidarity claimed that 70-90% of employees treated it as a free day. The issue then shifted to payment for those who had taken the time off. A one-hour warning strike was called for 3 February to press this and also the outstanding grievances of access to the media and recognition of a peasants' union. Faced with that threat, the government agreed to a compromise. The working week was not to be  $42\frac{1}{2}$  hours, as the government wanted, or  $41\frac{1}{2}$  hours as Solidarity had proposed in an effort to avoid conflict. Instead, the two sides settled for 42 hours. This was enough for the strike to be called off, but the Solidarity leadership still saw it as only a first step. Commitments on access to the media were very vague while there was no agreement on the peasant union.

This national conflict was only one part of the picture of mounting industrial chaos. In those areas where there had been major strikes in August, relations between the new unions and the authorities were often good. On the Baltic coast there were even local papers that gave space for Solidarity to present its own views. Elsewhere, however, relations were less easy and local strikes broke out during the winter of 1980-81.

One example of simmering conflict was Radom. In July there had

been a strike in the main engineering factory, but it had been contained by the management granting rapid concessions. It was October before a joint committee was formed linking together the factories in the area. Solidarity really started to grow after a group of miners from Jastrzebie had come to provide ideas and advice. Recruitment then was extremely rapid, with 80-90% of the workers in the big factories joining at once. This was despite obvious official hostility. The new unions were attacked in the press and replies were not published.

By the middle of November the union had overcome the first problem of organising itself. It was then in a position to present its first demands. The immediate issue was adequate premises and this was granted after the occupation of a public building. The next demands were for a full review of the events of 1976, as Solidarity insisted that the workers could not be held responsible for the vandalism, and for rehabilitation of those victimised. Soon it added a demand for more hospital buildings and for more spending on social facilities: there was a widespread belief that the area had been deliberately starved of resources in reprisal for the 1976 events. This could not be proven but it was certainly true that, despite an official recognition of the problems in a Political Bureau resolution, there had been no action to improve the facilities for the community. The demand was therefore raised to convert a new police station under construction into a hospital. The slogan 'for the people, not the police' won an immediate response. Needless to say, the police objected strongly to the suggestion that they were not a public service: in their view they needed additional facilities as 'we have nowhere to interrogate detainees, there is even a shortage of arrests'.<sup>11</sup> This was hardly an argument likely to win mass support in a town where the police had minimal public sympathy. Jokes about policemen – in a similar vein to the insulting anti-Irish jokes found in many parts of Britain – have been extremely popular for years.

It took another strike threat before the town's top officials were replaced and negotiations could begin. Even after that it seemed that no real concessions would be made. If Solidarity did not threaten to strike, then it was assumed that they were not really serious and that they were only putting on a show of populist slogans.

Inside factories too Solidarity had won the right to exist, but it was not typically regarded as a trustworthy partner for management and workers generally felt that their organisation was not being taken seriously. They could, for example, be denied access to factory

newspapers. Demands for a change in editor, or for some democratic means of appointment, were quickly stamped on on the grounds that it was a *nomeklatura* post that had to be decided on by the party committee alone. To argue with this was apparently to attack the leading role of the party.

In some factories Solidarity had its own papers which had been started during the strikes. In many cases, however, factory papers remained dull and uninspiring. As an example in the shoe factory Radoskor, which employs around 8,000 workers most of whom are women, one issue of their paper *Echo skorzanych* in May 1981 can illustrate just how much had changed and how much had remained the same. It contained just one reference to Solidarity. That was in a report of the events following the union's insistence on calling in a health and safety inspector. He found an appalling array of hazards suggesting 'a lack of resolution or of good will' from people in authority. Apparently nothing had been done for almost ten years. Surprisingly, however, the real praise in the newspaper's view could still go to the management which had reacted so amazingly quickly that all the reported hazards were removed within four days.

A lot of the paper was taken up with the contribution at the previous Central Committee meeting of Zofia Grzyb, a worker in the factory who had joined Solidarity. Despite that, the main article was a call by the director to reach plan targets. He was not proposing consultations or broad involvement on how to achieve this. In fact, he placed great emphasis on difficulties created by an alleged 'worsening of discipline at work and lack of subordination'. It is very difficult to evaluate the significance of those factors. They were a common theme for people in positions of authority, but it is hard to believe that they were causing problems on a significant scale in comparison with the difficulties due to chronic shortages. 80% of raw materials were imported from the West and a desperate attempt was being made to start producing shoes from plastic instead of leather.

Neither is it credible that exhortations alone could solve the problems. They indicated a continuing deep attachment to the old attitude of those in positions of power that their job was to manage while most people are to do as they are told and work hard. That concept was incompatible with the realities of the situation after August 1980.

It was therefore quite common for self-management structures to collapse in the midst of embittered relations within factories. Despite a better situation in a few factories, typically there was minimal

cooperation and consultation. Not surprisingly, it was frequently said that the only way to change anything at all was to strike.

There were strikes in individual factories, but the most important actions engulfed whole areas. The issues at first related to recognition. Gradually they shifted towards demands for the removal of corrupt officials, for better social services and for an end to privileges for top officials and the police. Converting party offices or police facilities into hospitals was quite a popular idea. During January 1981 the issue of an independent peasants' union, 'Rural Solidarity', was also important. This was partly because workers felt immediate solidarity with others demanding the right to organise. It was also because of the widespread belief that government agricultural policies had been a disaster. The way ahead, it was thought, was to give greater help to private farming, as demanded by the peasants themselves.

There was a strong element of naivety in this as in other economic questions. More resources for agriculture and greater incentives for farmers were logically incompatible with maintaining workers' living standards. There undeniably was an objective basis for conflict between workers and peasants over the level of food prices, but that had been masked by the deep hostility of *both* groups towards the government. There were, in fact, many Solidarity activists prepared to argue that *the party* had tried to create divisions between workers and peasants by encouraging urban prejudices against country people.

The government's refusal to recognise an independent peasant union therefore became an increasingly explosive issue as workers gave enthusiastic backing to militant peasant activists who were occupying public buildings. On 10 February the Supreme Court ruled that peasants could form an *association* but not a *union*. This would have deprived them of the right to strike or to bargain collectively.

Walesa urged them to accept this. Although Solidarity's central body, the National Coordinating Commission, had no formal authority over local organisations, he had been trying to hold back the rising tide of militancy. He had rushed into areas where conflicts erupted and often led negotiations to end them as in his view there was a real danger of continual conflict leading to violence and possibly the destruction of Solidarity. He had no doubt that the authorities would be very happy if they could eliminate the new unions but he hoped to be able to proceed by negotiations with the government even if that meant accepting a slower pace of change. He therefore gave a cautious welcome to the removal of Pinkowski and the appointment of General Jaruzelski as Prime Minister. On 12 February the new

government formally called for a ninety day period free from strikes.

The majority of the population would have welcomed this but it was not to be. The main underlying reason was the extraordinary instability of the balance of power in society. Solidarity had grown in a remarkably short space of time to a membership of about 9½ million.

This represented a greater share of the workforce than any Western trade union confederation, as total employment in the socialist sector of the economy was about 12½ million. There were other independent unions, owing allegiance to a separate centre, which gained 750,000 members and the old 'branch' unions still claimed 3½ million members. The exact figures were difficult to check: some employees belong to more than one union and all unions accepted pensioners. There was, however, absolutely no doubt that among the industrial working class, Solidarity had almost complete dominance. Even in offices, schools and universities many of the younger people in particular had joined Solidarity. Plenty of those who had not joined expressed broad support for its aims.

This indicated an extraordinarily deep desire for change. It also meant that the mass of the people had both the will and the means to push for change. The party however, as the next chapter shows, was unable to give leadership to this movement. It appeared instead to be making reluctant concessions only when it had absolutely no alternative.

Nevertheless, Jaruzelski's truce did seem at first to be achieving results. Then it was shattered by events in Bydgoszcz where the extremely militant Solidarity organisation was supporting peasant activists who had occupied the local offices of the United Peasants' Party. This was one of the legal parties that accepted the dominance of the PUWP although it was officially the political representative of farmers.

As a result of Solidarity's pressure it was agreed that the local council meeting on 19 March should discuss issues relating to peasant representation. Among those present were the local Solidarity leaders. To their surprise, the chairman found an opportunity to suspend the meeting before completion of the agenda. Some councillors and the Solidarity representatives decided to continue with a meeting of their own. Suddenly, and without any obvious justification at all, special police units cleared the hall. Among those requiring hospital treatment was Jan Rulewski, one of the most militant members of Solidarity's National Coordinating Commission.

The exact motive for this brutal measure, described by Solidarity as

'the most serious provocation against the union in its short history',<sup>12</sup> remains unclear. It is also unclear whose idea it was. It could even have been decided at government level. It could have been an act of blind hatred by some policemen, or it could have been a conscious political act ordered by people within the party who thought that Solidarity could be destroyed by a head-on confrontation.

The consequences, however, were very different from that. The next day the Solidarity leadership was demanding a full investigation of what had happened and an exposure of who was responsible. The party Political Bureau then committed a blunder that indicated how little it understood the changes that had taken place since August. It produced a reflex response insisting that it was right to use whatever means were necessary to prevent the occupation of a public building. Tension, it argued, was being created by many Solidarity activists who had been spreading an unverified and unconfirmed version of events. This was apparently indicative of a growing politicisation of Solidarity which contravened its statutes and was leading to a state of anarchy in the country.

At one time this sort of bland denial of a crime would have had no immediately disastrous consequences for the regime. With the emergence of Solidarity, however, people had acquired both the self-confidence and the weapon with which to hit back. There is no doubt that there was tremendous support when Solidarity threatened a four-hour general strike for Friday 27 March. That was to be followed by an indefinite general strike on the following Tuesday. The first demand was the immediate punishment of those responsible for the incident but, as before, further demands were quickly added including a call for the dismissal of specific senior police officers. Solidarity was also insisting on the right to reply through the media, for the legalisation of Rural Solidarity which was already a mass organisation refusing to accept anything less than full recognition as a union, and for the ending of all cases against political opponents of the government.

Negotiations were not easy but the four-hour strike was a tremendous success. It was by no means restricted to Solidarity members. There were many others who believed that there was a real danger of a return to the past. Some people were convinced that an indefinite general strike would lead to a Soviet invasion, but they still saw no alternative.

At almost the last minute agreement was reached. On the basis of a report from the Minister of Justice, the government broadly accepted Solidarity's view of what had happened but did not accede to all the

additional demands. Police behaviour had been quite unjustified and those responsible would be tried and punished. Solidarity's activities would not be hampered by the government in future and everything would be done to avoid conflicts over the unsettled issue of 'peasant self-organisation'. Over the following weeks the Independent Self-governing Trade Union of Individual Farmers 'Solidarity' actually was registered and a Solidarity weekly began publication. The promise for a full investigation of those responsible for the Bydgoszcz events has yet to be implemented despite the passing of two deadlines. That must imply that a full investigation would be highly embarrassing to somebody in a powerful position, but we still cannot say who.

This, however, was not the fundamental issue. An opinion poll in the Solidarity weekly, conducted at the very beginning of April, showed how people had viewed the strike. 80% of the sample were Solidarity members, but 91% thought the strike call was justified. Only one out of 270 saw the outcome as fully satisfactory: generally they wanted immediate acceptance of the demands for access to the media and recognition of Rural Solidarity.

The most revealing point was people's assessment of the real source of the conflict. The Bydgoszcz incident was evidently only the immediate stimulus. A small but significant 'maximalist' group of 17% saw the issue as the fight 'for taking over full responsibility for the fate of the nation and the state'. 60% saw the issue as the demand for a real partnership with the government and a share in responsibility for decisions.

A similar view was expressed in letters to the paper answering the question of what people expected from Solidarity. As one argued, they wanted to be consulted, to be able to control the government and they did not want to be treated differently from the directors who could get away with petty pilfering. They wanted to ensure that those in high positions could never 'steal' from the workers again.

## NOTES

1. *Experience and Future*, p.62.
2. D. Singer, *The Road to Gdańsk* (New York, 1981), p.216.
3. Quoted in W.F. Robinson (ed.), *August 1980: The Strikes in Poland* (Munich, 1980), p.60.
4. *Solidarność*, 30 August 1980, translated in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, IV, 1-3, p.33. Other quotes on the situation in Gdańsk are from translations of the strikers' bulletin in the same issue.

5. *Labour Focus*, IV, 4-6, p.16.
6. See the account of one of the experts in *ibid.*, pp.12-13.
7. These and the Jastrzebie agreement were sold on bookstalls throughout the country in the pamphlet *Protokoly porozumień Gdańsk, Szczecin, Jastrzebie* which was produced in a print of 200,000.
8. *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 11 September 1981, supplement with the report of the union's first year of existence, p.1.
9. *Biuletyn Statystyczny*, June 1981. The figures on output and foreign trade in this section are from the same source.
10. S. Anerewicz, 'Radomska historia', *Zycie Gospodarcze*, 29 March 1981.
11. *Zycie Radomska*, 12 May 1981.
12. *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 11 September 1981, supplement, p.2.

## 6 The Party – Renewal or Disintegration?

### *Kania's line runs into trouble*

As soon as the leadership had settled the August strikes, it was hit by a barrage of criticism from *within* the party. The mass of ordinary members were as disillusioned as anyone else with the state of the country, but their attitudes were different from those of most Solidarity members. They found themselves in a specially difficult position. As one Central Committee member put it 'in the present period it is pretty hard to be a party activist, it is pretty hard to be a member of a basic party organisation, for we are not only in the front line of activity, but also in the front line of sharp and often very painful and aggressive debate'.<sup>1</sup> In short, they had to take the rap for the leadership's blunders.

It is therefore hardly surprising that over 300,000 members left the party between April 1980 and May 1981. Two thirds of these were workers and losses were particularly heavy in the big factories in the main industrial centres. Possibly a million other members expressed their disillusionment less dramatically by joining Solidarity but retaining party membership. They did not, however, create a united force within the new unions pushing for a particular policy.

This was effectively impossible at the time because the most striking attitude within basic party organisations was confusion and disillusionment leading to a very strong emphasis on criticism and condemnation of the leadership. Resolutions demanding dramatic changes of personnel flooded in from August onwards and even at Central Committee meetings it was insisted that 'renewal in the party is impossible under the leadership of the same people who led the party before those recent events'.<sup>2</sup> That was a view that could come both from Solidarity members and from those who were highly suspicious of the new unions.

Under these circumstances the leadership was bound to have a difficult task to win the confidence even of party members. A chance event that could have made this slightly easier was the change in

leadership occasioned by Gierek's resignation in early September following a heart attack. It was clear that he would be unable to resume heavy commitments in the future so he was quickly replaced by Stanislaw Kania who had previously been regarded as one of his loyal supporters. Kania, however, was aware from the start that major changes would be needed if the party was to win back public confidence. This was made clear from his concept of 'socialist renewal' which he outlined at the Central Committee meeting on the night of 5-6 September.

His starting-point was an absolute insistence that a political solution had to be found. The use of force was to him nonsensical as he believed that it had been one of the factors undermining public confidence in the past. Nevertheless, he could not come forward with a convincing and inspiring programme. In fact, he emphasised the need for a great deal of 'thinking' as answers had to be found to the difficult questions of how to find 'the road of successful development', of what sort of programme to construct and of what guarantees should be instituted to ensure against a repetition of the situation.

He relied on an assessment of the nature of the strike movement as 'a mass, workers' protest not aimed against socialism or the party, but against faults in its policy'.<sup>3</sup> The fact that so many party members had participated reassured him. Their actions, he claimed, had 'often ensured the peaceful character of events' and this gave him the confidence to believe that, once the faults had been identified and corrected, the party could win back the full trust of the working people.

This already sounds like an underestimate of the depth of the crisis. It depends, of course, on how broad a meaning is attached to the notion of 'faults' in policy, and Kania made it clear that his interpretation was much narrower than that of the DiP report, let alone that of Solidarity activists.

The roots of the crisis, he argued, were to be found in the economic and social policies of the 1970s. Many of Gierek's measures had apparently been correct, but Kania argued that there had been mistakes from very early on. In particular, he mentioned 'voluntarism' and a cavalier attitude towards 'the economic laws of socialism'. This had involved, he claimed, an excessively high level of investment, a high level of indebtedness and a low priority to agriculture. Not surprisingly, he saw measures to overcome the economic difficulties as the most important for winning back public confidence. Some changes were instituted very quickly. An important example was a switch in

agricultural policy to give greater help to private farmers. The slogan 'everything for agriculture' was repeated on all sides, but it could hardly be expected to bring speedy results when there was already so little to share round.

Alongside an unexciting catalogue of universally-recognised mistakes, Kania fully acknowledged that the fault was not purely economic. It also depended on 'the methods of leadership' and, in particular, on the precise mechanism for taking major decisions. He correctly condemned the 'propaganda of success' pointing to how it had left no space for criticisms or sobering voices. He claimed that some Political Bureau members had proposed corrections, but their voices had had little effect.

In one sense Kania's first address to the Central Committee as First Secretary could appear as a crushing condemnation of past policies. He was certainly much stronger in his criticisms of what Gierek had done than any prominent party figure before. That, however, was no longer a relevant consideration. In comparison with Gomulka in 1956 and even Gierek in 1971, Kania's speech was pretty tame. It did not even mention crucial points that were already widely taken for granted.

It was, for example, widely assumed throughout society that a common thread connected the Poznan events of 1956, the student demonstrations of 1968, the strikes of 1970-71 and of 1976 and the emergence of Solidarity in 1980. Implicit in that assumption was a critique of the model of socialism that had been created in the late 1940s. It was therefore utterly nonsensical to expect people to believe that the 'faults' were a feature of the Gierek period alone. Solidarity would never have arisen if people had not realised that the problems went much deeper than that.

There was some implicit recognition of this when, in preparation for the party congress in July 1981, the leadership presented a lengthier analysis which contained much more powerful condemnations of past practices and looked back to 1948 as the possible starting point for 'deformations'. The suggestion was that the lack of democracy in the party and in society generally had never been put right completely. Despite the changes made in 1956 and 1971, 'bureaucratic centralism' apparently still dominated in the party, the state and the economy.

Kania, however, did not emphasise this point and neither did he draw major conclusions from it. Although he saw democracy as the key issue and insisted that it 'is not a gesture of the government towards society, but a great and growing necessity for socialism', the

actual changes he proposed were comparatively modest. He foresaw a more active role for parliament, for self management at work and for local councils. The key to democracy in society, however, was said to be democracy in the party.

It is hard to see how this could have satisfied those millions of non-party members who already had no trust in the PUWP. Nevertheless, Kania insisted that it was the most important issue of all. It was the best guarantee for the future as in his view the principal root of mistakes and deformations was to be found in the failure to apply 'Leninist principles and norms of inner-party life'.

Moreover, his whole conception of politics led him to insist that only the party could lead Poland out of its crisis, but that could only be possible if the leadership could restore some confidence. He therefore had no choice but to listen to ideas from below and he quickly gave his backing to calls from many basic organisations for an emergency congress, soon suggesting that it should be held in the spring of 1981. He was also prepared to take very seriously suggestions that all party officials should occupy a post for a set period only. This and other changes, he suggested in early September, 'must be considered in the course of preparation for the congress'. In the light of mounting pressure within the party, he gave positive support to secret ballot elections for the top leadership at the December 1980 Central Committee meeting and he also said that he welcomed the replacement of officials at lower levels who had lost the trust of the membership. By December he could report that 500 people had been removed from leading positions. At the end of April 1981 he reported that 758 people had been expelled from the party, including some members of the Political Bureau. Some of these were judged to have been responsible for the crisis in a purely political sense. They had pursued and advocated incorrect policies. Many, however, were judged to have committed criminal acts. Typically these involved using state funds for private purposes and building houses for their own private use. In early July 1981 it was announced that 3,500 people faced prosecution for offences of this sort. Some cases of corruption gained widespread publicity and before long it became clear that Gierek and Jaroszewicz had both been guilty of criminal offences. The anger of ordinary party members is easy to understand. The sheer extent of corruption made it easy for many members of the public to dismiss the whole party as a gang of criminals, thieves and parasites.

The leadership hoped that by checking thoroughly on all cases of

suspected misconduct, they could restore faith in their own moral standards. There were, however, suspicions from the start that they were dragging their feet. The removal of corrupt officials became a demand in a number of strikes over the winter of 1980-81.

It would have been quite possible for the party to have won back a lot of prestige, but not by means of these sort of measures which concentrated so heavily on inner-party relations. It had to take wider initiatives and provide political leadership for the whole of society. To a great extent this had been achieved in 1956 when party members and party organisations had sprung to life and played the key role in, for example, creating workers' councils as new democratic structures serving the whole people.

Kania was at least aware of the problem as he wanted to enable every party organisation 'to stand in the front line of positive changes. It must initiate them'. This, however, remained a general statement of hope. It was not backed up either with a deep enough critique of the existing model of socialism or with a programme of action that corresponded to the feelings of the mass of the population. There were, it must be added, some prominent party members who understood slightly better what was needed. Zofia Grzyb, a worker in Radoskor, called for a real programme which should include, for example, 'a guarantee of the liquidation of excessive differences in standards of living in our country'. The argument was that that could dramatically improve the party's image as 'if such an issue was taken up honestly then we can be certain that workers would join in its implementation'.<sup>4</sup>

This was not the dominant attitude. More typical were blanket criticisms of the leadership and demands for more internal democracy. Kania did effectively nothing to counter this tendency for the party to turn still further in on itself. It all serves to show how unaccustomed the party had become to the need to *win* support from the people. It was taken for granted that it had a right to a monopoly of power.

Following on from this, Kania also underestimated the significance of the rise of Solidarity. He, and others in the leadership, could look with satisfaction at the Gdansk agreement and the annex to the Solidarity statutes. It seemed that the new unions accepted the leading role of the party, the socialist system and the alliance with the Soviet Union. They did not intend to play the role of an opposition political party. The implication was that no major change had taken place in the people's thinking or in the country's political structure so that, to a great extent, the 'strategy of manoeuvre' could still be applied. He

could therefore look forward to the creation of an alliance of people of 'good sense' who cared for the future of Poland. This was to include the other parties, non-party people and he was especially pleased at the 'responsible' attitude of the church which seemed more favourable to the authorities than at any time since 1945. He saw all these forces grouping around the concept of socialist renewal outlined by the party. They were all to recognise who had the leading role.

The fruits of this approach were revealed in an opinion poll in the weekly *Kulisy* on 14 June 1981. Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they had confidence in a list of 15 public institutions and organisations. The PUWP came bottom with 32% declaring confidence in it and 60% no confidence. The Catholic church came top with the trust of 94% of the population, suggesting that it had won the respect of people who were not practising Catholics and probably even of some atheists too.<sup>5</sup> It was followed by Solidarity which had the confidence of 90% of respondents.

Part of the explanation for the party's poor showing was the economic situation. The most important factor, however, must have been its long record of past failures and the limited nature of Kania's conception of renewal. That does not mean that the changes were trivial or unimportant. Many of the mistakes of the past could have been avoided had it been possible to ensure democracy within the party. Nevertheless, Kania's programme was not enough to *win* a leading role in society. The leadership always seemed to be conceding to pressure rather than initiating changes. This gave credibility to Solidarity's claim to be the *only* force for renewal. It also lent credence to the suspicion that the leadership was not really genuine. There were plenty of people who suspected them of aiming ultimately to restore the same autocratic power structure that had failed before.

#### *The media and nationalism*

Nowhere was this more clearly illustrated than in the media. Changes certainly were impressive. Within a few weeks of the strikes articles began to appear criticising past investment decisions. There were investigative reports exposing the problems in Ursus, the Katowice steel works and other factories. There were interviews with leading officials in the Gierek period revealing that he had not listened to advice and criticisms. It is always easy to criticise leaders who are no longer in power, but this time the criticisms went further. They led logically to proposals for the future and to a discussion of what to do

with the half-completed investment projects.

Soon there were television debates on what should be done. The director of the factory making the Polonez was subjected to lengthy questioning to see whether it was right to proceed with the project. This suggested a new approach to economic policy. Had there been the same searching questioning before, a lot of mistakes could have been avoided.

This also gave a new and exciting role to journalists. They could actually investigate and expose the crucial areas of government policy. They could cover lively public meetings in which officials were harangued and questioned on their past failures to provide the services the community expected. In May there was even a very lengthy television programme in which the Bydgoszcz Solidarity leaders gave their account of what had happened and their views on the conflict with the government. Shortly afterwards Wajda's new film *Man of Iron* was shown throughout Poland. It was the account of the rise of a young militant who became a leader of the Gdansk strike in August 1980. There was no doubting the film's strident partisanship and its optimistic appraisal of the birth of Solidarity.

There was no denying a new atmosphere in the media, but it was still not enough. Kania's conception of renewal had not placed great emphasis on the means of mass communication, but some Central Committee members took a different view. Zofia Grzyb emphasised how it damaged her credibility when she had to admit ignorance on important issues. The lack of truthful information that people could trust, however unpleasant it might be, seemed to her to be the most important cause of the leadership's low standing. A heavy responsibility lay, in her view, not just with those who had committed errors in economic policy. She also placed much of the blame on those who had tried to 'disinform' society.<sup>6</sup> The clear implication of her argument was that democracy within the party, and hence Kania's whole concept of renewal, was meaningless without a new approach in the media.

The two outstanding problems were the coverage of Solidarity and its activities and the continued existence of strict pre-publication censorship. There were many opportunities for Solidarity leaders to express their views, but this was typically not the case at times of major political crisis. On those occasions, which of course were pretty frequent, the official media preferred to give only the official view and heaped invectives on the unions. Moreover, it was April before Solidarity was allowed a weekly with a print of 500,000 which was

still quite inadequate to satisfy demand. It clearly was a very important concession, but Solidarity felt entitled to a daily, like the old trade unions which had come to represent only a small minority. There were frequent official pronouncements about a shortage of paper, but that was hardly a convincing explanation as it was possible for new journals that broadly supported the authorities to start publication.

There was therefore no doubt that Kania meant it very seriously when he insisted that the party leadership had to retain ultimate control over the media. This was, he claimed, an essential element in its 'leading role'. It could accept criticisms of the past and discussions of the present and future policies, but it was not risking independent media that might directly criticise the existing government.

That gave special significance to the slow progress of the new law on censorship. According to the Gdansk agreement it was to be presented to parliament within three months. The old system continued to operate in the meantime with apparently about 400 journalists employed in censorship offices checking newspapers, books and journals for offensive passages.

The situation was immediately paradoxical as it became quite permissible to refer to the fact of censorship and to discuss what forms it should take. The first government proposals were quickly criticised by a group of journalists linked with Solidarity. The general principles of how the media should be restricted had been agreed in Gdansk. The crucial issue was to frame a law in such a way as to prevent the government from acquiring the power to stamp out criticism and the diversity of opinions. The journalists therefore objected to censorship remaining the ultimate responsibility of the Prime Minister, preferring to give control to parliament. They also wanted clear exemptions for scientific works, for any books published after 1945 – these were likely to be withdrawn if the author had emigrated or fallen from favour for political reasons – and for meetings of parliament and local councils and for internal bulletins of legal mass organisations. The government had proposed full exemption only for parliament, but it did contemplate a right of appeal ending ultimately at the Supreme Court. That was possibly the most important change of all as it would mean that the *criteria* for censorship could not be arbitrarily reinterpreted by a party leader wanting to avoid an uncomfortable truth. The decision would have to be justified in a court of law which, hopefully, would be independent of direct party control.

The three month deadline passed without a clear government

proposal. According to a report in *Polityka* on 15 November 1980, it believed that another year would be necessary to work out the law. So, despite the extent of changes, the issue of free and reliable information remained an explosive one. Solidarity members knew that even their own journal was not necessarily telling the whole truth as it too had been passed by the official censors, although it did develop the helpful practice of indicating when a passage had been disallowed. Not surprisingly, uncensored bulletins were still published and conflicts arose over the right of the authorities to control the content of papers that Solidarity produced in some of the big factories.

This continued even after 1 October 1981 when the new censorship law did begin operating. It contained a lot of the Solidarity demands. It included a right of appeal and gave ultimate authority to parliament while the censor's office was to be monitored by a body with one third government representatives and two thirds chosen from political and social organisations. Even that could not end conflicts and radio and television remained firmly under the party's control.

There were also major changes in the recognition of Poland's national traditions and in restoring cultural freedoms. This was clear very quickly in the response to the award of the Nobel prize for literature to Czeslaw Milosz. He had emigrated from Poland to the United States in 1952. He still wrote in Polish but his works had not been published in his home country. Although there had apparently been pressure for this at a writers' congress in 1975, it had been vetoed from above. He was, however, widely known and copies of his books appeared throughout the country: it was not only a narrow intellectual elite who enthusiastically welcomed the award.

In the event the authorities quickly decided to welcome it too as a world recognition for Polish literary achievements. His works were praised in the official media and, inevitably, plans were made for their publication.

Among the other changes was the decision to honour the memory of Sikorski on the hundredth anniversary of his birth in May 1981. Articles appeared giving a broadly positive appraisal of his exploits and a request was made for the return of his remains from Britain. They were to be placed alongside the tombs of Polish kings in the Wawel castle in Krakow in what was to be a symbolic, patriotic act. In the event the British government refused the request.

The decision to honour the memory of Sikorski and also Pilsudski was, of course, not a sudden change but rather the further development of a trend that had begun under Gierek. It was definitely

a popular decision as one symptom of the depth of Poland's crisis was the growing interest in its past achievements. People had lost faith in the existing system so that, if they were not to lose faith with Poland altogether, it was natural to cling to any aspect of their national identity that could be a source of inspiration.

The leadership's response to this, however, did not lead to a fully objective account of Polish history. They still refused either to praise or to condemn Sikorski for his prominent role in the defeat of the Soviet army in 1920. They simply evaded the whole issue, thereby failing to satisfy the growing desire for the full truth about the nation's history. They also failed to provide a serious answer to the suggestion from some uncensored publications – and a suggestion that definitely could command support – that the military conflict of 1920 was one of Poland's great achievements and that it should not only be acknowledged but also *celebrated*. They were providing no serious counter to the growth of a naïvely chauvinistic nationalism.

They also refused to tolerate any discussion of the Katyn massacre. Official policy was to allow no mention at all of anything that caused offence in the USSR. This must have greatly weakened the leadership's chances of winning back public confidence. One of the most important immediate changes under Gomulka had been the new relationship with the Soviet Union which suggested that the crimes of the past would be put right. Kania had nothing comparable to offer.

#### *Slow renewal in the economy*

As the party leadership placed great emphasis on economic failures for causing the crisis, it was natural that its notion of renewal should contain a programme for the economy. There were, in fact, two essentially separate kinds of programme. One was for the immediate emergency measures in face of the present difficulties. The other was for a model of management of the economy with a greater reliance on the market mechanism. This was often presented as an essential part of a recovery programme. Failures, so it was argued, stemmed partly from the faults in the old model. Overcoming the crisis, it might seem, would therefore be greatly assisted by a better model of economic management.

Unfortunately, as was pointed out in Chapter 3, greater reliance on the market mechanism is impossible in a situation of general shortages. It could only work once the shortages have been overcome. That could be achieved by means of massive price increases which

could never be easy for a regime with minimal public support. It could also be helped by a speedy restoration of industrial output but that too implies that market oriented reform is dependent on solving the immediate crisis rather than being the key to that solution.

It is therefore surprising that so much emphasis has been placed on these proposals. This may reflect some naïvety about what could be achieved. It also seemed to reflect a strong revulsion towards even thinking about the present situation. When things are so bad, the outlook so bleak and serious proposals so hard to think up, there is an overwhelming temptation to concentrate instead on ideas for what could have averted the crisis, or for a system that could produce an economic miracle in the future. When Walesa returned from Japan in May 1981, reporters leapt on him at the airport to ask if he seriously believed his statement that Poland could produce an economic success story to match Japan's. He and his interviewers were not the only ones who liked to think in such terms. A vision for the future may well be necessary to keep people's spirits up. That was the main immediate significance of the economic reform proposals. Their existence could have helped to win back some confidence in the party's ability to propose solutions and to provide leadership, but they did not provide the immediate solution to the economic crisis.

In practice however, the Gdansk agreement marked a dramatic change towards support for something similar to the Hungarian system. Earlier in the year economists had been talking in general terms of the need for changes, but they had been in no position to systematise their views into a definite proposal. Then, with the collapse of the leadership's authority and the return of Olszowski who had apparently been an admirer of the Hungarian economy for some time, the battle seemed to have been won. Reform was being advocated from all sides with grossly exaggerated expectations of what it could achieve.

By mid 1981, there were seven identifiable proposals.<sup>7</sup> The most important was produced by a special commission set up by the government and party leadership in September 1980. Almost 500 people, covering many different roles and specialisms, helped in the preparation of its draft proposals which were published in January 1981.

The stated aim was to find the basis for solving the economic problems that were allegedly at the root of the country's general crisis. This was to be done by improving the economy's effectiveness by creating an economic system that would make possible 'the

realisation of the principle of democratic self management of the working people of People's Poland'.<sup>8</sup> It was thereby implicitly recognised that the old system of highly centralised planning had had a deadening effect on people's initiative.

These proposals became the centre of a broad discussion. There was no shortage of strong criticisms which focused on the issues of democracy, powers for self management bodies, and the precise means of implementing the changes. There was also a lot of detailed discussion of the precise powers for individual enterprises within the system of planning, but there seemed to be little opposition to the general idea of decentralisation. At least in terms of purely economic mechanisms, the Hungarian system was broadly acceptable.

The issue of democracy was raised in the document at a number of points. It was recognised that there had to be participation and consultation on strategic decisions. Parliament was to be given a greater role and a number of alternative structures were suggested to allow for expert advice.

This implied a definite advance on the old system. Nevertheless, articles in the press, and especially in the economic weekly *Zycie Gospodarcze*, made it clear that it was too small an advance for many people. There were criticisms in leading economic organs of the failure to define the role of the party: it could make formally more democratic structures meaningless. There were also criticisms of the relatively low emphasis placed on the question of democracy. There was an appeal from the economists at Lodz University for total rejection of the proposals which had allegedly ignored the main direction of thinking of Polish economists.

This general line of criticism was taken up in a persuasive article in *Zycie Gospodarcze* in April 1981 written by Ryszard Bugaj – one of the few prominent Solidarity economists – along with three of his colleagues. Genuine social control, they argued, depended on the freeing of information, the liquidation of regional-sectoral pressure groups and the creation of new structures. The priority they attached to these points made them highly critical of the proposed implementation process. The official proposal set a detailed timetable which was to be completed at the end of 1982. It placed major organisational and institutional changes in the final phase. The first six months, up to mid 1981, were to see changes in methods of planning and organisation as they affect individual enterprises. There were to be new elections to workers' councils and price adjustments. In practical terms, this was unrealistic in view of the disastrous economic

situation. Bugaj and his colleagues therefore advocated starting with institutional changes at the *centre*. They felt that there was already a crying need for new democratic structures as indicated by the wide role being assumed by Solidarity.

They therefore welcomed the idea for a council of expert advisers, but felt that a separate chamber of parliament concerned with economic affairs would be more appropriate. This certainly does have its attractions as it would have made possible detailed scrutiny of difficult economic decisions. The idea was also motivated by past experience of failure in the implementation of reforms. It was felt that they could not be entrusted to old institutions nor to powerless advisory organs. It became an important element in Solidarity's economic thinking in the summer of 1981.

Bugaj and his colleagues believed that only after some such democratic changes could the more technical aspects of the economic reform come into operation. There had first to be some recovery in the domestic economy starting with improvements in the energy situation. Then there could be serious talk of price reform.

They were certainly right that the timetable was unrealistic. Only on the workers' council elections was there any sign of a start in the first half of 1981, and even that was very sporadic. When provisional councils were formed that itself created scope for further conflicts and the official reform proposals were soon being criticised for their limp references to the powers of self-management bodies. It was a big advance that all representatives were to be directly elected by the employees but the crucial issue, as before, was the power of the director and the procedure for appointment and removal. Very little of substance was changed from the original laws of the late 1950s.

Three alternatives were suggested in the initial draft for the appointment procedure. They all gave a role for self management, but they all left the ultimate decision in the hands of a higher authority. It was also made clear that, although the director was to implement resolutions of the supreme self management body, he could refuse to do so if they could lead to a 'serious violation of society's interests.'

There are strong arguments for *not* giving the workforce full authority over their own place of work. That would immediately rule out central planning, even on the Hungarian model. Moreover, should the employees be motivated entirely by narrow self interest they could exhaust all the enterprise's funds by paying out massive amounts in wages. Even if the enterprise were then declared bankrupt, something which does not happen in the Polish economy as organised at the

moment, they could simply find work elsewhere and repeat the same procedure. The only obvious discouragement to this would be a significant level of unemployment.

This, of course, need not be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to extending the power of self management. All employees are not totally obsessed with self interest and some safeguards could be worked out to deal with those that are. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that genuine socialisation of the means of production is not necessarily achieved by giving maximum power to employees. There are other interests in society that should also have a say in how enterprises are managed. Giving the final say to a higher authority – along the lines of the government's proposals – need not mean 'bureaucratisation' of the whole system if there is some means of ensuring social control all the way up the hierarchy. That again points to the need for democratisation at the top rather than just within enterprises as a precondition for giving employees greater power in economic life. It could provide an adequate basis for removing intransigent directors while still keeping the benefits of a degree of central control and preventing groups of workers from abusing power for their own sectional gain.

Weaknesses in this area led to very powerful criticisms of the government commission's draft which was supplemented with a detailed proposal on self management. There was a lot of support within the party for making it clear that something genuinely new and better was on offer. The hope was that giving workers a greater say could be seen as part of a 'social contract'. In return, workers could be won to support unpleasant but necessary changes such as price increases. They might also use their power within industry in a very responsible way. They could play a major role in improving the performance of the economy.

There were therefore a number of critics of the proposals who wanted a clearer differentiation from the Hungarian 'managerial' model. They saw the greater role for direct democracy in the workplace as the possible key to a vastly superior model for a socialist economy. It could provide the basis for great achievements at some point in the future.

This sort of view found strong support at a large meeting in the Warsaw car factory organised in May 1981 by a party discussion group linking together factories within a 'horizontal structure'. Many of the ideas of 1956 were revived and the existing proposals were strongly criticised. They were likened by a self management activist

from Poznan to 'a modernised train'. It contains important new elements which go beyond superficial changes 'but the train still will not run because, quite simply, it is up a siding. That siding is precisely the idea of participation and limiting worker or employee self management within the confines of a single factory'. If workers are to have a real chance of playing an active role in leading the country out of the crisis, he continued, then they must have real powers to take decisions rather than just to present opinions. That must find support 'in a whole system of self management together with a competent chamber of parliament'.<sup>9</sup> He was coming very close to reviving ideas that had been so forcefully condemned as 'anarchosyndicalist' in the late 1950s and that were just beginning to stage a revival within Solidarity.

The crucial issue for others was the right to elect and dismiss the director but, despite this level of discussion, the party organisations were still not taking the lead where it mattered. The initiative for the emerging provisional workers' councils typically came from Solidarity activists among whom, of course, there were a lot of individual party members. The dominant attitude within the party however, was often unsympathetic to the principle of a genuine workers council. In one large lorry factory the party secretary suggested: 'let the director appoint people to the particular committees; he knows best what they know about.'<sup>10</sup>

Intransigence and ill-will from factory managements strengthened the growing demand within Solidarity for an alternative programme of reform which is discussed in Chapter 7.

Solidarity members were also highly critical of the other aspect of the government's economic proposals, that is their ideas for solving the immediate crisis. Although some aspects of the government's thinking were clear from the time the Gdansk agreement was signed, they could not produce a coherent stabilisation programme until the late spring of 1981. Earlier drafts had been rapidly outdated by the pace of economic decline or had failed to get approval from all the government bodies concerned. Even the document they did produce was condemned by Rulewski, leading a Solidarity team of negotiators, for allegedly being totally inadequate. This time he could confidently assert that his was by no means an extreme view. Parliament itself rejected the report.

The criticisms were that it failed to give a clear enough impression of the disastrous state of the economy. It appeared to be a catalogue of specific failures. It did not answer the crucial question of who or

what was to blame. Neither could it really convince people that they had to accept drastic measures if the economic situation was ever to improve. Criticisms from parliament therefore seemed to centre on the *political* role of the programme. The suggestion was that confusion and indecisiveness within the government were preventing the formulation of a forceful enough document to inspire any public confidence in the authorities' ability to solve the country's problems. In July, however, an improved version was accepted by parliament.

A major part of the economic proposals was a list of priorities for immediate government objectives. The first were alleviating the shortages of food and medicines which were causing particularly serious discontent at the time. Some other consumer goods, such as children's shoes, were also mentioned. Great importance for genuine stabilisation was attached to energy and exports.

A list of priorities does not amount to a solution. That was much harder to find. It was, however, repeatedly emphasised that coal could be the key to recovery. A good harvest would ease the balance of payments situation, but a full restoration of coal output to its peak level in the 1970s could reverse the trade deficit with the West. Coal was, of course, a special problem because, unlike many manufactured goods, exports could not be increased at the expense of domestic consumption. There was already too little for Poland's power stations and a further reduction would have accentuated the decline in output throughout domestic industry.

The government and party leadership were therefore eager to find a way to raise coal output. The theme was taken up repeatedly in public speeches and throughout the press. One obvious solution would have been to employ more miners. There were suggestions that another 30,000 would be needed as the mines had always been short of labour. In practice, however, it was hard to believe that these extra workers would appear. There was certainly no easy solution to be found by transferring people from factories that were closing down or by using soldiers during their national service. Neither of those methods were realistic in view of the high levels of skill required to run modern mining machinery.

The only hope for an immediate solution was to lengthen the working week again. There were continual references to how much an extra day's work would contribute and repeated appeals for miners to do voluntary overtime. It was, however, emphasised that this could never be compulsory. The 'inhuman' conditions that had been endured before the Jastrzebie agreement would not be enforced again.

Some miners did respond to these appeals and they did work extra shifts. Generally, however, they were not impressed. They did not believe that they were responsible for the state of the economy and it was therefore not obvious to them why they were being called on to make the greatest sacrifices to solve its problems. There was also a lot of scepticism about the value of working extra shifts. It would increase the risk of accidents, but it might not raise output as over-use of machinery could lead to frequent breakdowns. There were even some who doubted whether output had dropped. Apparently in one mine the director some time before had ordered a machine to mix stones with coal so that he could reach his output target. It might seem utterly ridiculous that such a thing could happen at all, let alone on a wide enough scale to significantly affect the total output figures. There were, however, many other examples of 'sham fulfilment of plans' that were widely believed to be true. Solidarity leaders from Katowice, interviewed in *Polityka* in December 1980, quoted the example as an indication that the high levels reached in the 1970s were not to be taken too seriously. Moreover, there was general discontent about the consumer goods shortages and many miners were claiming that their diet was inadequate for such demanding work. Apparently some had fainted through lack of food.

Under these circumstances, miners were prepared to do what they could, but they were not willing to take full responsibility for the fate of the economy. In numerous interviews and discussions reported in the press, their main positive suggestion was for new investment and for speedy delivery of spare parts for existing machines. The government insisted that hard currency was always available for mining, but miners still thought more could be done for their industry.

This, of course, left the government and the party leadership in a very worrying situation. Without solving the coal problem it was difficult to see how the economy could recover. No proposals for overcoming the crisis could be taken seriously.

#### *The party on the point of collapse?*

Under these circumstances the leadership's standing within the party remained abysmally low. In fact, it faced a continuing crisis of confidence. The crucial practical issue that defined the trends in the party was the attitude towards the need for major changes. Put in its crudest form the spectrum of views stretched from those who saw no need for change – and who therefore blamed 'counter-revolutionaries'

for any conflicts – and those who saw the emergence of Solidarity as a very positive development that could lead to a process of democratisation. Kania stood somewhere between these views arguing that some important changes were necessary if the party was to consolidate its effective monopoly of power. It was, however, very quickly apparent that his strategy was failing. Strikes were continuing throughout the country and Solidarity was broadening its role way beyond traditional trade union issues. He then had to explain what was happening and evolve policies that could lead towards his objective of social peace and a restabilisation of the power structure.

There were differences of emphasis within the Political Bureau, but there was unanimity in placing the principal blame on Solidarity. Speaking at the Central Committee meeting in December 1980, Kania maintained that 'it is possible to understand the motives which lead workers to use the strike weapon in support of wage and social demands. Life for many working people is very hard. But there can be no justification for strikes of a prestige or of a downright political character'.<sup>11</sup>

The blame for Solidarity overstepping the limits imposed by its own statutes, he was convinced, must lie with its advisers, some of whom were 'persons linked with subversive imperialist centres abroad'. He claimed to have proof for this accusation, but his evidence was far from convincing. It centred on the insistence that, in view of the serious economic difficulties, Poland desperately needed social peace. It therefore seemed that nobody who really cared for the fate of their country could deliberately 'exploit the feelings and natural reactions of some social groups in such a way as to prolong the crisis'. That is simply not adequate proof of a supposition that was so crucial to the formulation of party policy.

Kuron in particular was singled out. The fact that he was in favour of a multi-party system was taken as evidence that he was trying to create anarchy and chaos. Continual strikes and disruption would apparently worsen the economic situation and thereby block the road to renewal. By the spring of 1981 Kania could not believe that the whole Solidarity membership genuinely supported the strike calls. It was, he insisted, a workers' movement. It contained hundreds of thousands of party members. He could not accept 'that they all supported a course leading to "anarchy, counter-revolution and the liquidation of socialism".<sup>12</sup> In his view it had to be the work of those unnamed, and at that time probably unnamable, individuals who wanted 'a bloody reckoning with the supporters of socialism'.

This analysis can only be interpreted as the result of blindness. Kania, still trapped in old modes of thought, was barely beginning to understand the depth of the crisis. He was, however, remarkably broad minded when compared with Political Bureau member Tadeusz Grabski who showed no hint of understanding for Solidarity and accused it of using 'psychological pressure' to get people to strike. Rakowski, widely regarded as the most prominent 'reformer', tended to take a different view. He placed greater emphasis on the leadership's inaction and indecisiveness, but he still had no doubt that 'extreme radical' elements were leading Solidarity into unnecessary conflicts.

Even this was very hard to substantiate. If he, like the other leaders, was referring to Kuron, then his assessment was wrong. It was true that Kuron had a great deal of influence in the Solidarity leadership, and he did advocate, as an ultimate goal, a pluralistic political structure which, at that time, was still unacceptable to the party leadership. Nevertheless, he did not think that this could be achieved by encouraging anarchy. He if anything preached moderation. The roots of militancy in Solidarity were to be found in the thinking of many ordinary workers, not in the machinations of 'agents of imperialism'.

The leadership, however, was convinced. The conclusion it drew was that it should try to stand firm and hold out against the 'radicals'. This was apparently the intention of the new government under General Jaruzelski appointed on 11 February 1981.

The prestige of the armed forces remained very high despite the loss of credibility for all other elements of the existing power structure. Their standing might even have been *rising* with the revival of memories of Poland's past military achievements. Jaruzelski could therefore appear as a possible saviour for the system. An example of naïve faith was given at a later Central Committee meeting by Gerard Gabrys, a miner from Katowice, who looked with horror at the disorientation and nervousness of the working class among whom 'reigns a psychosis of fear'. His solution was for Jaruzelski to assert his authority. 'Comrade Prime Minister – appear on TV and speak to the people. They will certainly believe you because they know that you are a soldier.'<sup>13</sup>

At a more mundane level, Jaruzelski promised to try to improve the working of government which was widely accused of indecisiveness. He later accepted this criticism of his own government too and placed the principal blame on the abnormality of the situation and the

extraordinarily difficult decisions that had to be taken. Over the following months difficulties continued and there were frequent ministerial changes. Before long four posts were held by army officers. This did not mean that the government was immediately heading towards a military dictatorship. Its real significance was that the party, having failed to implement a policy that could regain public confidence, was increasingly hiding behind the prestige of the armed forces. Ultimately that was a dangerous road because it failed to confront and solve the fundamental roots of the crisis.

Nevertheless, the change in government did have more helpful implications. Jaruzelski's appointment was accompanied by a genuine attempt to improve contacts with Solidarity, and Rakowski was appointed Deputy Prime Minister with special responsibility for dealing with the unions. As a former editor of *Polityka* he was likely to command considerable respect. He had published lengthy interviews with Solidarity leaders and generally advocated political reforms.

In practice, however, the new government soon found itself confronting the most serious crisis since the previous August. Moreover, the Central Committee met on 29 March, just two days before the indefinite general strike was to begin. At that point, as Rakowski later pointed out, 'for the first time since September, a mass bloc has been created of the main party organisations together with Solidarity'.<sup>14</sup> He could still see the 'extreme radical forces' as the main immediate cause of 'chaos', but he insisted that its fundamental cause was to be found in 'the deep crisis of confidence of society in the party, a crisis that still remains'. He accepted that people simply did not believe that the party was serious about wanting to implement a programme of renewal.

Grabski, of course, took a very different view. He completely failed to understand the reasons for people's grievances. Bydgoszcz to him was no more than a pretext that was being exploited by the 'forces of counter-revolution'. They had allegedly been stepping up their 'fight for power' and had already created a situation of 'dual power'. He even managed to insist that he still supported the Political Bureau resolution of 22 March that had given a ludicrously one-sided account of the Bydgoszcz events as indicated by the subsequent Ministry of Justice report. Aware that this put him in a minority position at the meeting, he offered to resign from his party posts.<sup>15</sup>

He certainly was hopelessly out of tune with the representatives of the main industrial centres. About a quarter of the Central Committee members were industrial employees and they tended to be very critical

of the leadership. An example was Antoni Wrobel, an electrician in the Plock petrochemical plant who clearly felt that, had his advice been heeded, then the horrific situation at the end of March could have been avoided.

He had made the point very clearly in December that the government's proposals for a shorter working week commanded little support. A confrontation would only lead to a further loss of credibility for the party which could only help the 'radicals' in Solidarity for whom he had no sympathy at all. His views seemed to have been passed over at the time, so he came in March armed with resolutions from basic party organisations.

One of them contained a grave warning that the party was in a critical state, 'on the eve of its disintegration. Ordinary members of the party in their overwhelming majority do not identify with the leadership.' This feeling had been brought to a head, as another of his resolutions made clear, by the leadership's attitude over the Bydgoszcz events. Olszowski, who had overall responsibility for the media, had even appeared on television giving an account that was so distorted that it could only destroy any remaining trust in the leadership. The resolution therefore demanded the immediate public naming of those responsible for the production of the 'resolution on the Bydgoszcz events before the completion, and in fact, even before the start of the investigation by the Government Commission', because 'that resolution caused the greatest disgust and discontent among the whole population.'<sup>16</sup>

There were calls for immediate changes in the party leadership, but they were linked to the widely accepted rumours – there was of course no other source of information on these questions – that there was a division within the Political Bureau.

Kania and Jaruzelski were judged to be serious about renewal while some other unnamed figures were to be sacked at once. Even Kania, however, was judged to be out of touch with the thinking of ordinary party members and he was strongly urged to come to Plock, formally-speaking his own party organisation, and hear for himself what people were saying.

In the event, the Central Committee ended up expressing confidence in the whole Political Bureau. Offers of resignation from Grabski and also from Olszowski were rejected. Kania had restored temporary confidence in the whole leadership, but he had only done this by finally setting a firm date in July for the special congress. This was a major reassurance to the leadership's critics as they knew that unpopular

figures would soon be forced to answer for their actions and that they could then be removed without difficulty.

Another very significant 'concession' was the acceptance of the new 'horizontal structures' formed by linking together party organisations which held discussions outside the party's formal structure. The movement started in some big factories and universities. It grew out of the disillusionment of ordinary members who felt 'cheated and ashamed'.<sup>17</sup> They were left, they said, with one last desperate question 'where is the party?' The whole situation seemed like a nightmare in which it had simply ceased to exist. 'Representatives of the leadership did not want to come to any meetings, because they did not know what to say and they were scared to say anything.' It seemed that the leadership was unable to revive the party so the idea was to 'consolidate the party from below'.

At first the movement was regarded with restrained suspicion by the leadership. At the March Central Committee meeting, however, Barcikowski presented the Political Bureau's view that 'the links are useful if they help towards an exchange of experiences, if they lead to an awakening in ideological life and if they give rise to valuable initiatives, as long as they develop within the framework of the party statutes'. In his view, the lack of inner-party democracy was 'the main cause of the present general crisis'. It was therefore obvious that 'the party needs discussion'.

Any possible conflict with party statutes was easily overcome by the leadership giving formal recognition to the movement's first forum which took place in Torun on 15 April. It was not condemned as a 'factional activity', but praised as an element in the pre-congress discussion. Representatives of Solidarity and of the party leadership were invited. Some did attend and the Central Committee even indicated its general support by paying for the delegates' lunch.

However, the leadership's attitude was still somewhat reserved. A few Central Committee members became actively involved. One of them was Werblan who saw the movement as containing a lot of naïvety, but nevertheless providing a valuable opportunity for making contact with 'the masses'.<sup>18</sup> His sudden conversion to the cause of democracy raised many eyebrows within the party.

The crucial issue, of course, was the content of the discussions. The principal emphasis at Torun, and at earlier meetings, was on inner-party democracy. To ensure that this time renewal really meant something there had to be, it was argued, secret ballot elections for congress delegates. It was also essential that there should be no

restriction on pre-congress discussions and that led to complaints about 'the blocking of information'.<sup>19</sup>

There was, however, no attempt to work out a programme that could broaden democracy beyond the party. There was no attempt to press Kania in a serious way over the leadership's failures to allow a trustworthy mass media or to provide a convincing immediate economic programme. There was certainly no pressure for a major democratisation of society. The movement was therefore limited from the start and that made it easier for the leadership gradually to concede to its most persistent demands.

It was widely assumed within the party at the time that these concessions were meeting strong opposition from a group within the leadership and within the party apparatus. Although Kania several times denied suggestions that there were any serious differences within the Political Bureau, he did occasionally acknowledge that obstacles were created by 'conservative resistance' and by some unnamed individuals failing to understand the essence of the changes that were taking place. This could have been a reference to officials in localities whose stubbornness led to conflicts with Solidarity.

It is, however, unclear how sharp the disagreements were in the Political Bureau. It is certainly unclear whether Kania really felt himself to be restricted by 'conservatives'. He seems generally to have been able to pursue those policies which emanated from his own analysis of the situation. Nevertheless, the fact that there were disagreements was brought out into the open after a letter had been received from the Central Committee of the CPSU in June 1981.

#### *Soviet pressure constricts renewal*

Soviet concern about events in Poland was clear from the time of the strikes in August 1980. It was a long time before the Soviet media even acknowledged the existence of Solidarity. During the autumn of 1980 there were a number of unfortunate stories in the Soviet press. Probably the worst was a *Tass* report on 8 December which claimed that Solidarity had effectively seized power in a factory in Kielce and that party members who protested had disappeared. *Trybuna Ludu*, the Polish party paper, carefully refuted these claims – which had no factual basis at all – and the Soviet press then dropped the story, but there was no explicit retraction. The Soviet public were still left with the impression that counter revolution in Poland was imminent.

More generally, there was a difference of approach between the

Soviet leaders and Kania. During the spring of 1981 they issued very forceful condemnations of Solidarity and also of developments within the party. Apparently 'revisionists' were threatening to take over. The impression was that, if only the party leadership could stand firm, then they could somehow stop the rot. As we have seen, Grabski tended to take a similar view within the Polish party leadership.

These implicit Soviet criticisms gave credence to suggestions in the West that an armed invasion of Poland was imminent, but it is impossible to know whether that was true or not. The Soviet leaders' objective, it should be remembered, is for a stable government in Poland in unquestioning alliance with the USSR. They would therefore be likely to send in their armed forces if the Polish leadership was actually being overthrown or if it seemed likely to renounce membership of the Warsaw Pact. That, of course, leaves considerable scope for flexibility. There can be widely diverging opinions as to when a government really is losing power. If armed intervention seemed likely to replace an apparently weak government with a firm one, then it could seem a feasible option even before 'counter revolution' had really started.

For this reason an automatic comparison with Czechoslovakia in 1968 is misleading. In that case, despite Soviet claims to the contrary, a Communist Party was still firmly in control. The Soviet leadership knew that the Czechoslovak leaders could see no future in opposition to the USSR. They therefore knew that armed resistance would be opposed by a government which commanded the loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the population. That gave them good reason to believe that they could impose a regime of their choice without too much difficulty.

Poland presents a totally different situation. An invasion would almost certainly have been met with an immediate general strike. Armed clashes would have been likely and could quickly have escalated into a horrific confrontation. The economic catastrophe in Poland would have been worsened and Western goodwill would have disappeared. That would have put a very serious strain on the Soviet economy.

Moreover, it could have been very difficult to find a Polish government able to maintain order on its own. Whatever doubts there might have been about Kania, the attitude towards him and Jaruzelski was always very much friendlier than that towards Dubcek. The reason for this was probably his willingness to acknowledge the self-proclaimed right of the Soviet leaders to concern themselves with

Poland's internal affairs. That, of course, stemmed partly from the fact that he did share their fears of a possible counter-revolution and he wanted their help, in the form of economic assistance, to ward off the danger. He would also have been fully justified in insisting that he was not following Dubcek's road to democratisation. The fundamental disagreement with Brezhnev was therefore not over aims so much as the methods to achieve those aims.

It is also important that the Soviet leaders had a very strong hold over the Polish leadership even without the threat of force. The Polish economy would collapse without their help. If they wanted to be deliberately obstructive they could bring it to a halt very quickly by cutting off oil supplies.

It is therefore far from certain that they were ever on the point of armed intervention. Military manoeuvres could have been intended as a threatening reminder to the Polish people that an invasion was a possibility. That could have helped consolidate the party leadership's hold on power. Generally, however, they preferred to support the Kania leadership as the best chance available for a restoration of stability. They were very concerned about what was happening and there was a general trend throughout Eastern Europe to cut contacts with Poland down to a minimum. Poles found it very hard to visit even close relatives in neighbouring countries and business contacts were disrupted too. Even in Hungary, generally one of the more liberal of the East European countries, factories were refusing to allow anyone from Poland inside. Presumably they feared that the contamination would spread. Kania, of course, knew better than to complain about this. He accepted the situation and even joined in accusations that it was the *imperialists* who were trying to drive a wedge between Poland and the other socialist countries.

During the summer of 1981 there was a marked hardening of Soviet attitudes. This was illustrated by the extensive support given in the Soviet media to the so called Katowice Forum. They were a group of party members described even by Olszowski as well-known 'dogmatists'. They adopted a declaration on 15 May, published on 28 May. It attacked Kania's leadership for 'indecisiveness and inconsistency'. Apparently he was capitulating to an alien ideology, allowing the media to be taken over by 'revisionists' and opening the way for counter-revolution. The clear implication was that a tough stand was required.

Over the next few days basic party organisations held meetings which totally repudiated the views of the Katowice Forum. On 2 June

it was condemned by the Political Bureau and on 4 June it suspended its activities. Despite that, it continued to receive unqualified support in the Soviet media.

It is possible that the Soviet leadership hoped that these views were widely held in the Polish party. If so, there might have been a chance to force a change in policy and in leadership. Whatever their hopes, they sent a letter to all Central Committee members which was received on 5 June. It was discussed at an emergency meeting a few days later.

The letter expressed broad support for the principle of socialist renewal. Apparently there had been strong Soviet criticisms of Polish economic policy before that which had not been heeded. It was, however, claimed that the new party leadership had failed to counter the enemies of socialism. It had apparently made continual concessions and retreated step by step. This was leading to a situation in which 'counter-revolutionaries' were 'already winning' a struggle for power. They had, it was claimed, gained control of the mass media. The press, radio and television were apparently working for the enemies of socialism. Needless to say, no evidence was provided for this claim.

The party leadership was accused of refusing to listen to deeply critical statements from within the PUWP and also of ignoring the friendly advice of the Soviet leaders who had apparently expressed their concern on a number of occasions. Kania and Jaruzelski had indicated agreement, but nothing had changed in their practice.

It seemed to the Soviet leadership that the forthcoming Polish party congress could be a real disaster. Forces hostile to socialism were allegedly setting the pace and, in a particularly revealing allusion to secret ballot elections, it was claimed that delegates were being chosen 'at random'. The horizontal structures were branded as an instrument for dismantling the party. It seemed possible that the congress could culminate in an attempt to 'deliver a decisive blow to the Marxist-Leninist forces in the party' which presumably, in view of the dogmatically sectarian tone of the whole letter, meant the removal of people like Grabski. The obvious implication was that the congress should be cancelled or at least postponed until such a time as the delegates could be selected rather than elected.

Kania responded to all this by accepting that there were justifiable grounds for concern and criticism. He did not openly disagree with the Soviet letter, but neither could he possibly go along with the full spirit of it. He was well aware that any attempt to alter the congress

preparations would have destroyed the tenuous credibility he had managed to establish. The only important concession he did make was to accept the need for a firmer control over the media.

Others, however, took the opportunity to expand on the Soviet letter, using it as a theoretical starting-point for wide ranging criticisms. Grabski was one of the most condemnatory. He seriously questioned whether renewal did not really mean the toleration of 'a very precisely thought-out road to the overthrow of socialism, the liquidation of the Polish United Workers Party and in consequence to the loss of our independence and sovereignty'.<sup>20</sup> He followed this with a series of bitter accusations implying highly irregular practices from Kania. He complained, for example, that the Political Bureau had not even discussed the Katowice Forum so that it was a total surprise to him when he read of its condemnatory resolution in the newspaper. While still accepting responsibility for what had been done, he claimed that he only knew through the media of many important events including an agreement reached in Lodz with students, the compromise over Bydgoszcz and the legalisation of Rural Solidarity. This, he insisted, was a decision that *contravened* the position of the Political Bureau. He concluded with the question 'can members of the Political Bureau lead the country out of its crisis under the leadership of Comrade Kania? I do not see such a possibility.'

Grabski's diatribe contained an extremely clear expression of the view that the party leadership was entitled to a total monopoly of power. Even the courts were apparently to be bound by its resolutions. Under such conditions, of course, the legal system could never hope to win back public confidence. This point, however, was not taken up by Kania's political ally Barcikowski, who reacted very strongly against Grabski's criticisms. Instead, he insisted that he did know about these decisions and effectively challenged Grabski's honesty by congratulating him for his ability to take up a totally contradictory position of accepting responsibility for decisions about which he was allegedly ignorant.

Rakowski too had little time for the leadership's critics. In his view the Soviet letter had to be 'studied carefully' to see what could be learnt from it. The essence of his contribution, however, was a forceful condemnation of those, such as Najdowski, the Torun party secretary, who wanted to drop the insistence on 'surmounting the crisis by peaceful means and by our own strength' in favour of the formulation 'at any cost and by our own strength'. If that really meant inviting a third major bloody confrontation then, in Rakowski's view, this time

the party would not survive it. He insisted that there was no easy road based on a tough line against 'extremists' because 'the extreme is not so easy to identify'. At this some of the delegates started stamping and shouting that the crisis was due to excessive softness in the past, and one of them shouted out 'it is all your fault, the fault of politicians like you'.<sup>21</sup> Rakowski's answer was to insist that there was no alternative to 'realism'. He had, for example, been a supporter of the recognition of Rural Solidarity. The alternative seemed to him to be strikes and occupations of public buildings throughout the whole of Poland. Had he been prepared to say 'no' to everything he did not like, then he would have been saying 'no' very frequently over the preceding ten months. That, however, would have been pointless when there was no support from the mass of the population. This defined his whole position very neatly. Despite his reputation as a 'reformer', and his ability to admit frankly how little support the leadership retained, he too was not an advocate of real change in the methods of wielding political power.

In the end the attempt to unseat Kania failed. He offered to submit himself and the whole Political Bureau to a vote of confidence but his proposal was rejected by 54 votes to 17 with 70 abstentions. Nevertheless, the Soviet pressure did have an important effect on party policy. It served to hold back the pace of changes that were vital if the leadership was to win back public confidence. This applied most obviously to the media which was very soon to become the central issue in disputes between the government and Solidarity.

Another effect was to make it more difficult for anybody to propose an alternative to the leadership's policies. An alternative, that is, that would involve moving towards agreement and partnership with Solidarity.

There certainly were people who could have developed their ideas along these lines. It was often suggested that Poland could be successful precisely where Czechoslovakia had failed in 1968 because the reform process could expect solid backing from a mass workers' movement. Such views, of course, could not be published. Officially the myth still had to be maintained that Czechoslovakia in 1968 was in the midst of a counter-revolution. Poland was said to be following a completely different road.

Nevertheless, there were articles in *Polityka* implying that Solidarity really was a guarantee of major change. The reform movement was no longer just a hope of a few intellectuals. It was, however, never possible to develop from this a policy really distinct from the

leadership's.

Soviet pressure made this very much harder, but that is not the whole explanation. It does seem that the concept of a leading role for the party, meaning an effective monopoly of power, was very firmly entrenched among the membership. After over thirty years it was accepted as a fact of life, and that was a major obstacle to ideas for new structures of political power or for a new relationship with mass organisations following the birth of Solidarity.

### *The extraordinary congress*

These constraints were clearly in evidence during the preparations for the extraordinary party congress in July. Heated discussions were held throughout the country. Meetings that previously would have lasted only a couple of hours in the early afternoon continued into the next morning. Established leaders were criticised and new officials elected throughout the party.

Despite all this there was no major challenge to Kania's position. When he did return to the Plock petrochemical plant in early May, his speech failed to inspire the audience. The television reporter, who in previous years could have interviewed plenty of sycophants, found only disappointed delegates. Some were highly critical of Kania's failure to indicate *how* they were to implement the economic reform. He had left it all at the level of unconvincing generalities. Others were critical of his failure to produce an economic programme to lead the country out of the crisis. Clearly, they wanted a positive lead. They wanted to be able to combat the pessimism within their ranks that had led one fifth to resign their membership.

There was, however, nobody else who could provide this lead. Instead, personal discussions in Radom indicated that the main emphasis in pre-congress meetings was on the importance of secret ballot elections. The argument was that this could prevent a repetition of the mistakes of the past. It was not obvious to many party members that they might never be in a position to repeat the same mistakes if they could not produce policies to inspire wider public confidence. The crucial concept of the party's right to a monopoly of power remained unchallenged. There were, however, dramatic changes *within* the party. All the delegates were elected by secret ballot. That ruled out any possible accusations of manipulation from above. Previously, a high-ranking official could bring a proposed list of delegates to a

meeting. They would then be approved by a public show of hands with no scope for proposing alternatives.

There was still controversy over the so called 'central' delegates. These were leading party officials who sought nomination by basic organisations. Without that they could not stand for re-election. Many basic organisations simply refused to accept this but, after the Soviet letter, Kania made a point of ensuring that most were elected so that, in his words the congress 'could make its evaluation of them'.<sup>22</sup> He personally did not stand in Plock but was almost unanimously elected in Krakow. Rakowski represented the steel works in the same town. Barcikowski was elected in Szczecin despite strong opposition from the shipyards. Grabski was rejected in Poznan even after Kania's personal intervention. He was later selected in the very small town of Konin. In the end, only four out of the 19 Political Bureau members failed to be elected. Nevertheless, only about a third of the old Central Committee had won mandates.

90% of the delegates were attending their first congress. Only 22% were industrial workers compared with 45% at the previous congress. This may have reflected working class disillusion with the party, especially as workers had gained the opportunity to work in Solidarity. It may also have been because many workers in the past had been selected as tokens. In any event, the delegates seem to have shared the view that elections were the crucial issue. At the congress itself there was a heated and confused argument on the first day over how to elect the First Secretary. It was finally agreed to elect the Central Committee first. The procedure chosen was to cross off the names of unacceptable candidates from a list of 275. The top 200, provided they had more than 50% of the votes, would then be declared elected. This procedure may have had some effect on the outcome. Controversial people tended to be eliminated. Grabski failed, but so too did Fiszbach, the Gdansk party secretary who strongly favoured good relations with Solidarity.

In fact, only 19 of the old Central Committee were re-elected and the composition of the new body showed a marked shift away from party and government officials, their representation being cut from over half the Central Committee to under 20%. Their places were taken by employees in industry, with a specially sharp increase in manual workers, and by individual farmers who occupied 15% of the places compared with 1% after the previous congress. Another indication of disillusionment with the past was the election of Solidarity members who made up over 20% of the delegates, although

that was a small representation compared with the 56% from branch unions.<sup>23</sup>

The election of the First Secretary became something of a non-event. There were rumours of seven possible candidates, but in the end there were only two. Barcikowski was proposed by the Central Committee alongside Kania. This satisfied the demand for a contested election, but it ensured that there was no contest over policies. In the event Kania won by 1311 to 568. The more significant point was that 60 delegates opposed *both* candidates. That suggested that there was very little uncompromising opposition to Kania's policies.

The Political Bureau election followed the recommendation of the Central Committee. It included the four members of the old leadership who had been elected to the Central Committee. These were Kania, Barcikowski, Jaruzelski and Olszowski. The other eleven were newcomers and spanned the full range of party views. Zofia Grzyb was elected, but so too was Albin Siwak, a foreman in the building industry who had made a speech blaming Kania for an alleged breakdown of the rule of law. He was opposed to seeking agreement with Solidarity and he was one of the few Polish leaders to have been quoted by the Soviet news agency Tass.

This, then, was a predominantly new leadership. It had been elected by secret ballot and could claim the confidence of the whole party. The demand for a clean sweep of the discredited leaders of the past had largely been fulfilled. It was, however, unclear how much had really changed. It seemed likely that the main effect was to strengthen Kania's position. That could even become an embarrassment to him as it would be much harder in the future for anybody to suggest that he was being held back by 'conservatives'.

The real issue, however, was how far this new leadership could win back public confidence. Despite the emphasis in the congress on new election procedures, this depended primarily on the policies it could work out.

There were, of course, many discussion contributions from delegates, but they did not point in a clear direction. The most enthusiastically received, and also the best, was from Rakowski<sup>24</sup>. He managed to warn the delegates of how dangerous the situation was while also giving them grounds for optimism. He saw the greatest danger of all in crisis becoming 'a permanent way of life', because ultimately that could only lead to disaster. It was impossible to imagine how people would react if, at some point in the future, there were shortages again of milk, washing powder, cigarettes, macaroni,

vodka and matches. It was clearly essential to find a way out as quickly as possible.

He was, however, convinced that Kania's line was the only correct one and he therefore had to pose the question 'why is the crisis continuing?' His answer was to put the principal blame on 'conservative forces in the party' who, while small in number, 'occupied strategic positions in the party and in the government apparatus'. He claimed that it was their fault that all agreements and reforms were seen as 'concessions'.

The argument was immediately popular as it implied that, with changes in personnel at the top, the party could start to rebuild its prestige. Rakowski could even provide the highly optimistic perspective that Poland, from being 'the sick man could become one of the sources of hope for socialism'. There was, however, no clear evidence for his explanation which tended to conflict with his own earlier statement that he too was accepting changes that he found unpleasant.

His other three reasons were also questionable. He placed blame on an unnamed small number of 'vociferous' groups who 'under the slogan of democracy were aiming for the destruction of the party' and also accused 'radicals' within Solidarity. Although these groups had been condemned by Kania and other members of the leadership too, it was not made clear how either of them could have caused the continuing crisis of confidence in the party. He was probably on safer ground when he pointed also to indecisiveness from the Central Committee and Political Bureau, although that could hardly be the fundamental problem.

His solution was to be based on 'courageous leadership' and he proposed in particular that the party should 'give up the present formula for the Front of National Unity'. This body had brought together the two other legal parties and a number of mass organisations and ensured that they followed PUWP policy. He wanted it replaced with a more authentic unity including Catholic groups and movements that might emerge in the future such as self management. He expanded on this point in an interview in *Marxism Today* in October 1981 in which he correctly pointed to the need for a major change in 'the way power is wielded'. The system of 'one-party rule' had to be replaced by 'a partnership or coalition arrangement'.

His actual intentions were less radical than they sounded for two reasons. The first was that he insisted absolutely at the congress that, even 'within a new Front of National Unity we will not give up our

leading role'. It is, however, difficult to reconcile this with the hope for genuine partnership which requires mutual respect and a recognition of equality. It is only possible when any one of the partners can win the right to a leading position on the basis of its policies. Rakowski was evasive and ambiguous on this point and simply insisted in the interview that the PUWP had to retain its dominance because 'socialism can't be built by a bourgeois party'. It is impossible to take seriously the extraordinary implication that all other political forces are of necessity 'bourgeois' as that would effectively contradict the purpose of a united front.

The second reason was Rakowski's refusal to include Solidarity within the new front although trade unions had been included before. That ensured from the start that it could represent only a minority of the nation. He expanded on this in the interview, justifying it with the argument that the crisis was due to 'temporary' dissatisfaction with the party's policy and that Solidarity was losing popularity. He could foresee it splitting with the 'radicals' leaving to form a 'provocative political grouping' which would not be legalised. This indicates a fundamental failure to understand the depth of the crisis. Nevertheless, and despite the enthusiastic reception within the Polish party, Rakowski's speech at the congress was not reported in the Soviet press which instead regretted the appearance of some unnamed 'revisionist' contributions.

Another indicator of the mood of the delegates was the response to Jaruzelski who topped the poll for the Central Committee. He was well received when he demanded to know who was behind the attempts at creating confrontations, and there was approval for his insistence that there were limits to what the government could tolerate. In the end the congress adopted a major programmatic resolution on the causes of and the way out from the crisis. It was criticised by some delegates for the alleged inadequacy of its analysis. There was, however, no time left for discussion. It had to be voted on quickly on the basis of promises that further ideas would be looked at in future. There was therefore only a truncated discussion on the most important issue of all.

This was unfortunate as the document itself could have benefited greatly from a longer debate that would have given it greater publicity and allowed improvements. It was full of generalisations that had drowned out most of the definite commitments. It had nothing of substance to add to earlier analyses of the roots of the crisis although

there was a recognition of the need for 'a thorough and honest explanation of all the dramatic events in the post-war history of the country, especially the most painful ones: the Poznan tragedy of 1956 and the tragedy of December 1970 on the coast'. A commission was therefore to be established 'to clear up all the circumstances and facts, including the personal responsibility for the decisions'.<sup>25</sup> That was a very welcome commitment.

Generally, however, the starting point was continued insistence on 'the guiding and leading role' of the party. There was apparently no need to win the right to this on the basis of public confidence. It was already given by the party's alleged 'class, workers character'. This highly abstract concept could then be used to justify insistence on opposition to any 'weakening of the party's influence'. It was to maintain its role by, among other things, close attention to 'cadre policy'. It was left very vague what this meant, but it sounded like a commitment to continue with the *nomenklatura* system. There was certainly neither any criticism of that notorious practice nor any hint of positive enthusiasm for the vital commitment, accepted in Gdansk, that appointments should 'be based on qualifications and not party affiliation'.

A striking illustration of the strengths and weaknesses of the document was the decision to aim for a gradual equalisation of pay until the lowest earnings were half the average and the highest three and half times the average. This was apparently 'the most justified for the 80s', although the upper limit could be judged to be too high by many people. Kania avoided greatly offending the tiny minority with very high earnings by suggesting that it could be achieved by holding the highest earnings constant for a number of years.

The document was making a very positive commitment which would be quite unthinkable in any capitalist country where the top incomes are very much higher but, under the special circumstances of Poland after 1980, it was not likely to inspire much confidence. It was, for example, not obvious why an *immediate* reduction was not possible in the First Secretary's salary from a level which shortly beforehand had been nearly five times the average. That would have made the promise more credible and would also have added some weight to repeated reminders from the leadership of the need to accept hard times. It is hard to believe that it would have led to any real hardship. It would, of course, have had an even more dramatic impact if Kania, continually claiming to be a Leninist, had advocated Lenin's

famous proposition that all monetary privileges to officials should be abolished and that '*all* servants of the state' should receive no more than 'workmen's wages'. This he described as a 'self-evident' democratic measure that, alongside the insistence that all officials must be elected and subject to recall at any time, could 'serve as a bridge leading from capitalism to socialism'.<sup>26</sup>

Kania could then, for once, have claimed some moral superiority over Walesa, who was himself paid about two and a half times the average, putting him within the top 2% of earners, although Solidarity's draft programme, discussed in the next chapter, had accepted the principle that 'the preservation of privileges for people exercising power is socially dangerous' because those who are 'isolated by privilege from the realities of life for the rank and file citizen and alienated from society, are unable to understand society's problems'.

There was also far more to the issue of privilege than just the level of the highest earnings. The Gdansk agreement had itself made references to privileges for the police and army and to some of the special facilities for top officials. The secrecy around the highest salaries was being removed, but there was still no clear information about additional perks. In fact, a two-part article in the Solidarity weekly on the subject of privilege was rejected by the censors before the party congress. This was justified on the grounds of alleged inaccuracies in the text, which should hardly be decided on by a censor, and because it could apparently encourage people in acts aimed at 'overthrowing the constitution'. That presumably meant that its information on perks, such as free use of cars and housing by top officials, was likely to discredit those in power in the eyes of the public.

The journal's editor insisted this was a typical case of the continued abuse of censorship powers to protect top people from criticism. His arguments proved adequate to persuade the authorities to yield and publication was allowed in November. Nevertheless, as in so much else, the party was making itself appear a conservative force. It was lagging behind public opinion and that made even the changes it proposed appear as concessions granted unwillingly, and, it could easily be suspected, with no intention of their being implemented.

The congress therefore ended with a new Central Committee that could claim some right to be trusted *within* the party. The most serious internal crisis had been overcome and the party was consolidating itself into a body of 'moderate' opinion. There was, however, no basis for winning wider public confidence and without

that there was still every possibility of general distrust towards the party as a whole leading to another crisis of confidence in the leadership.

## NOTES

1. Zofia Grzyb, *Nowe Drogi*, January–February 1981, p.32.
2. *ibid.*, p.33.
3. *ibid.*, October–November 1980, p.11. The other quotes from Kania's speech of 5 September 1980 have come from the same source.
4. *ibid.*, January–February 1981, p.32.
5. A survey of 711 Solidarity members, who are likely to be more religious than most, in May 1981 in Wrocław revealed that 67½% were practising Catholics while 4½–6½% were convinced atheists.
6. e.g. *Nowe Drogi*, May–June 1981, p.44.
7. See D.M. Nuti, 'The Polish crisis: economic factors and constraints', in *Socialist Register 1981*.
8. *Podstawowe założenia reformy gospodarczej Projekt* (Warsaw, 1981), p.10.
9. *Zycie Radomska*, 26 May 1981
10. *Zycie i nowoczesność*, 21 May 1981.
11. *Nowe Drogi*, December 1980, p.12.
12. *ibid.*, March 1981, p.43.
13. *ibid.*, April 1981, p.112.
14. *ibid.*, p.138.
15. *ibid.*, pp.102–4.
16. *ibid.*, p.100.
17. L. Witkowski (of the Philosophy Department of Toruń University), *Polityka*, 7 February 1981.
18. *Nowe Drogi*, April 1981, p.134.
19. *Polityka*, 25 April 1981.
20. *Nowe Drogi*, July 1981, p. 121.
21. *ibid.*, p.78.
22. *ibid.*, p.25.
23. These figures are from *Trybuna Ludu*, 15 and 18 July 1981.
24. *Trybuna Ludu*, 16 July 1981.
25. *Nowe Drogi*, August 1981, p.119. Other quotes from the document are from the same source.
26. Lenin, *Selected Works* (London, 1968), pp.293–4.

# 7 Solidarity – Trade Union or Political Opposition?

## *Splits and divisions in the union*

Solidarity was from its inception a unique organisation. In the space of only a few months it brought within its ranks the overwhelming majority of the working people. It inspired a new sense of self confidence and national pride and set in motion deep changes throughout society. It had won for itself a lasting place in Poland's history.

It was, however, woefully inexperienced. A little over a year is not long enough for a movement to work out its ideas and role when it had so little on which to build. Some of the strike leaders had been involved in the movement for free trade unions before, but that was hardly a preparation for the immense power they suddenly found themselves wielding. There were some experienced activists, especially from KOR and among Catholic intellectuals, but they too were completely taken by surprise by the sheer pace of events. The striking feature was therefore the *lack* of a coherent strategy binding together an articulate core of activists.

Walesa himself had enormous influence over the whole union. His exceptional personal standing was due partly to his role in Gdansk, but he maintained it thanks to his energy and determination over the following months. In a situation where new and inexperienced leaders did not know what to demand or how to negotiate, he alone had the experience and courage to take real decisions. His unique position eroded with time but he continued to be the figure in the limelight as he responded to invitations to travel around the world.

He was, however, no great political thinker and in recognition of this was very willing to listen to the advice of 'experts'. These were intellectuals who offered their services to Solidarity both at national and local level. They, however, contained at least two distinct trends, and were viewed with distrust by many of the militant workers. Among the mass of Solidarity members it became usual to refer to a major internal distinction between 'moderates' and 'extremists' or 'radicals'. The 'moderates' were those who were willing to reach an agreement with the government, while the 'extremists' were prepared to face a

major confrontation.

The division is, of course, extremely imprecise. Under certain circumstances, the *whole* movement was prepared to face a showdown, but only a very small minority were really looking for a total confrontation which could become a fight for power.

Behind this vague division, a jumble of ideas gradually took shape. There were some who thought of a ‘social contract’, but that position was at first very weak. It would have meant renouncing the economic gains won at Gdansk and it conflicted with the strong emphasis on an *independent* movement keeping its distance from the existing state structures.

Instead the dominant view was that Solidarity should maintain maximum independence by being a ‘non political’ trade union. It was neither to play a direct role in formulating policies nor was it to accept joint responsibility for their implementation. The model for such an approach was the strategy of independent coexistence with the regime worked out over the years by the Catholic church. It consistently counselled caution and moderation without openly pushing a clear political perspective, such as a ‘social contract’ uniting the government and Solidarity.

The church itself could hope to win very important concessions if it helped the government by defending social stability. Its leaders therefore came forward several times as a mediating force, trying to solve disputes. They were certainly still critical of the government, and there were always ways in which they could give moral support to its opponents. They could, for example, hold masses in memory of the Katyn victims or in support of political prisoners. That was a way of making the point while avoiding open confrontation. It was also a way of holding back those – particularly among students – who wanted street demonstrations.

This, however, could never provide a satisfactory model for Solidarity. The unworkability of the very narrow trade-union conception became clear in later months, and interest grew in Kuron’s ideas. He was by far the most politically coherent of Solidarity’s advisers and never saw the birth of the union giving rise purely to a ‘non-political’ movement.

Kuron was a controversial figure from the start and the authorities subjected him to continual attack. An example was a television broadcast on 23 September 1980 in which his statement ‘Don’t burn party committees, create your own committees’ was edited into a call for burning down party offices. Many Solidarity activists also resented

his presence, fearing their movement could be discredited by close contacts with KOR which was regarded as a political organisation. The church hierarchy shared these misgivings – having always been suspicious of a body dominated by atheist intellectuals with Marxist backgrounds – but Kuron continued to attend meetings of Solidarity's leading committees, as did the Catholic 'expert' Geremek.

Walesa was therefore careful to avoid an exclusive identification with KOR and emphasised from the start that he supported political rights for *all* opponents of the regime. This meant opposing the imprisonment of the leaders of the Confederation of an Independent Poland after Moczulski had advocated in an interview in West Germany the overthrow of the communist regime. He was arrested on 23 September 1980 and his release was one of the demands of Warsaw Solidarity when it threatened strike action shortly afterwards. Although it did not press the point at the time, the demand of 'freedom for political prisoners', regardless of their precise views, continued to be an explosive issue.

KOR, of course, had a special significance for the regime. It was, however, quite wrong to suggest that Kuron was encouraging Solidarity to be more combative. If anything the opposite was the case and he certainly had a very different position from the real 'radicals' such as Rulewski from Bydgoszcz.

Kuron outlined his ideas in an article in one of the uncensored publications in the winter of 1980.<sup>1</sup> His theme was how to face the danger of an invasion from the Soviet Union. In his view it could be avoided if the party was left in control of the government, the police and the army. That would be enough to ensure Poland's place within the Warsaw Pact. Only if that were seriously threatened would the Soviet leadership see no alternative to armed intervention. The aim therefore had to be 'wresting power from the Communists in succeeding areas of social life', but great care had to be taken to prevent the collapse of the existing authorities. He therefore favoured accepting a slower pace of change relying on negotiation and compromise. Pressure had to be kept up on the government, but extreme militancy alone would lead to a disaster. Provided everything was 'settled by negotiation', Kuron was 'convinced' that an outside intervention would not happen and that the Polish people would be able 'to achieve the necessary reforms without disturbing the borders watched over by Russian tanks'.

The exact meaning of his strategy was unclear and ambiguous. If he foresaw a process of gradual democratisation, leaving the PUWP in

full control of the repressive organs of the state but willing to yield its absolute monopoly of power elsewhere, then he had a chance of success.

The major obstacle to that approach was, of course, the party's failure to evolve a compatible policy. That ensured that the hostility of ordinary Solidarity members towards the authorities increased. Nevertheless, there was no reason to assume that the party was unchangeable – particularly when it was changing so much and when there was so much discontent within its own ranks. Moreover, the realities of the international situation meant that there was no future in a clearly anti-Communist movement taking power. The PUWP could have renounced its constitutional guarantee to a monopoly of power, and that had to be the objective, but it could not be removed completely. That means that a democratisation process *required* active help from within the party and even some gestures to reassure Poland's allies, such as initiatives towards establishing links with official trade unions. That may have meant a slower pace of change and standing firm against arguably justifiable demands from Solidarity members – persuading them that they had gained as much as was possible in the short period of time – but it could ultimately have led to the achievement of a more democratic model of socialism.

Kuron's strategy could also be interpreted as a call to eliminate all Communist influence throughout society apart from the police and army. That certainly was a position put by some Solidarity activists later on, and they probably developed their thinking from Kuron's ideas. The anti-Communist tone of the article, and some of Kuron's other statements, encouraged such a view.

It is, however, hard to see how the existing authorities could have yielded power over everything except the organs of repression. A government that has lost control over social and economic policy can hardly still claim to hold power at all. It is likely that, if Kuron's strategy had ever looked like reaching that point, a major confrontation would have taken place.

The immediate practical implication of Kuron's advice, however, was the need to avoid excessive militancy. Walesa certainly took that view seriously, but he never indicated explicit approval for the whole strategy. His 'moderation' was closer to that advocated by his Catholic advisers.

'Moderation', then, was preached by practically all those who had any strategy at all. The 'radicals' were not those influenced by KOR. They were often the people most suspicious of advisers and experts. In

fact, 'radicals' often expressed outright revulsion at talk of the need for an ideology. That, they claimed, had led Poland to disaster before. Instead, they were governed by the gut reactions of distrust and hostility towards the Communist regime described in the earlier chapters of this book. The principal source of radicalism was the desire to express revulsion at all the errors, crimes and displays of incompetence of the authorities. It was not restricted to any particular geographical areas, nor to specific social groups. It was strong throughout the industrial working class and possibly strongest amongst young workers, but it was not a direct expression of a class interest. In fact, deep distrust towards the authorities was prevalent throughout Solidarity. The crucial difference was that the 'moderates' were more prepared to accept the realities of the situation and from that to work out how things could be put right.

The division, however, was always vague and became confused with conflicts of personalities within the union leadership. These came into the open after the agreement of 30 March 1981 which ended the Bydgoszcz crisis. The most vigorous criticism of Walesa came from Rulewski who claimed that the negotiations had been bungled and that the union had come away with effectively nothing. It was certainly true that the government had committed itself to very little.

Generally speaking, Rulewski represented the most militant trend within Solidarity. Born in 1944 he had studied at a military academy but had refused to vote for the single list of candidates in a general election in 1964. He escaped punishment for this by illegally crossing the frontier to Czechoslovakia, but he was caught on the Austrian border and returned to a prison sentence in Poland. After his release in 1969 he qualified as an engineer. He could boast of all this as a record of seventeen years of consistent opposition to the regime.

He joined Solidarity in November 1980 and made an immediate impact with his belligerent demagogic. Much of his political thinking actually seemed to be little more than an extension of his aggressive personality. In an interview in July 1981 he denied having any aspirations to lead the union, suggesting that he was too rigid a person to hold together an organisation that contained so many different views. Walesa seemed to him to be the only man capable of this.

At the end of March, however, Walesa also came under fire from another direction. Andrzej Gwiazda, his deputy in Gdansk and one of the leaders of the August strike, argued in an 'open letter' that the negotiating team alone had no right to call off the general strike. Walesa, in reply, advocated speedy elections to the union's leading

committees and a rapid clarification of its organisational structure. It would then be possible, he argued, to take difficult decisions without fear of losing the trust of the membership. When it came to a vote the agreement was approved by 25 to four with six abstentions.

Solidarity's organisational structure, or as it was later described 'the deep disorganisation of its structure',<sup>2</sup> certainly gave maximum scope for internal conflicts and acrimony. At first there was no central authority and the Presidium of the Gdansk MKS took on the role of coordinating the work of emerging regional centres. On 17 September the decision was taken to form a single union at a meeting with representatives from the whole of Poland; out of that the National Coordinating Commission evolved. At the time of registration it had 45 members, but turnover was extremely rapid. By the middle of 1981 80% of its members had changed. This reflected the rapid turnover of leaders in the localities. A dramatic example was the disappearance from public view of the members of the Jastrzebie strike committee. Its chairman, Jaroslaw Sienkiewicz, was soon reported complaining that he was being picked on purely because he was a party member, although other Solidarity activists accused him of trying to create divisions within the union.

During this period Solidarity had an unwritten federal structure. Members of the Commission were nominated by regional centres and did not see themselves taking decisions binding on the whole movement. Instead, the intention was to decentralise further by creating a structure of industrial unions. In practice, the trend was clearly towards a strengthening of the role of the regional organisation structure and, above all, of the centre, as major decisions on national strike action had to be taken and as the leaders from Gdansk used their prestige to settle disputes throughout the country.

This tendency was welcomed by Walesa and in February 1981 he won support for the election of a 'Provisional Presidium' of the National Coordinating Commission. It had ten members, later extended to eleven with three of the Gdansk strike leaders included. It met once or twice every week in Gdansk, but its exact powers were still undefined.

It was also unclear how much formal authority was given to Walesa, although he definitely played an extraordinarily important role, pushing for his line of avoiding confrontations whenever possible and establishing a powerful central authority within the union. These remained largely separate issues for his opponents, as Gwiazda, who stood unsuccessfully for the post of regional chairman in Gdansk in

July 1981, could claim no programmatic differences. Although he was widely regarded as one of the most intelligent 'radicals', his only real complaint was that Walesa offended people and took important decisions on his own. Rulewski, however, did not make a major issue of internal democracy. In his view 'when the time for shooting comes, we cannot discuss who is to pull the trigger'.<sup>3</sup>

Walesa always seemed to have sounder political sense than his rivals, but he too was repeatedly dragged into supporting militant positions. A major reason for this was the fear that any significant split in Solidarity could be exploited to destroy the movement. It was this that made it impossible to argue that Solidarity should accept any share in responsibility for the fate of the economy. To have done so would have meant trying to persuade the members to accept sacrifices which, it was claimed for a time, was beyond the scope of the union's organisational structure, as the National Coordinating Commission could not issue instructions to all members. Probably of greater importance was the fear that, once the leadership ceased to express directly the feelings of the members, the new union could even be destroyed. The fear of losing support and independence was clearly expressed in articles in *Tygodnik Solidarność*, the Solidarity weekly.

By the same reasoning, the leadership had to accept the kinds of issues that the members felt most strongly about. Initially, as illustrated by a plan of action worked out in Gdansk, Solidarity was seen as concerned primarily with typical trade union issues. It contained proposals for reducing differentials by raising the lowest wages and it foresaw a big role for the new unions within places of work. They were to ensure speedy elections to new workers' councils and then to become involved in the use of enterprise funds for social facilities and housing. They were to check arbitrary management decisions and ensure the enforcement of health and safety laws. In short, they were to concentrate on making a good job of what the old unions had done badly.

In practice, most of Solidarity's time was taken up by directly political issues, as is clear from the account of the conflicts in the earlier part of this chapter. A typical Solidarity noticeboard in a Radom factory contained no references to immediate issues in the workplace. All the emphasis was on pictures of Walesa's visit and the dispute with the authorities in the town. Even in the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk, the local Solidarity branch secretary estimated in June 1981 that 90% of their time had been taken up with outside issues such as the fight for recognition of Rural Solidarity.<sup>4</sup>

The Solidarity weekly, at least in the first few months of publication, was even broader. There were articles on Polish history, literature and architecture. There were accounts of the events of 1956 and 1970 and eye-witness reports of what happened in Bydgoszcz. There was a lot of space for readers letters. There was surprisingly little on the life and organisation of the union, although that changed dramatically in the late summer when enormous coverage was given to discussions and debates surrounding the congress, or on economic questions and effectively nothing on traditional trade union issues. Although it was a paper giving the working class a chance to raise its voice its editor Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a former Catholic member of parliament and prominent journalist, seemed to be modelling it on the existing quality weeklies which were read primarily by intellectuals.

There was a great deal on how higher education should be organised, an area that changed quickly after the appearance of Solidarity. An independent student union had to fight to win legal recognition. It was only granted after a protracted strike in Lodz university which ended on 18 February 1981. There were also concessions allowing greater student control over the curriculum in higher education, and senior university administrators had to face selection by a freely elected body representing students and staff. Within a few months new Principals had been chosen and the autonomy of higher education had been increased dramatically. This was a particularly easy change to make partly because some of the measures were simply a return to the pre-1968 situation and partly because there was a far weaker case than in industry for strict application of the principle of one-man management and total accountability to a higher authority.

In fact these changes had also been advocated by the old student union which retained a substantial membership. Its leading members in Radom, where they had the support of the clear majority of students, saw the free elections and university autonomy as the key issues. They had a number of complaints about curricula that were rigidly set at the level of the Ministry and, above all, at arbitrary acts of the university authorities which reflected broader national conflicts. One example was the sudden decision to give three days holiday at the end of March so that nobody could take part in the general strike.

The new, independent union may have taken the decisive initiatives in forcing these changes, but it was judged to be 'too extreme' by many students. In fact, its leading activists did go much further than those in Solidarity in pressing touchy issues such as Katyn and

political prisoners.

Usually, however, those wanting major change joined Solidarity. It alone seemed to have the strength to make progress. Moreover, when asked *why* they joined, Solidarity members seemed to be unanimous in pointing to national political issues, the way the country as a whole was run and the model of socialism that had existed for over thirty years. Conditions in the place of work definitely took second place, although they could reinforce the belief that ordinary people had no real power.

This might appear to give credibility to official criticism that Solidarity was becoming an opposition political party and that it might even try to take power. It is, however, unrealistic to expect any good trade union to keep out of politics. This is especially true in a country where the government has so much control over the economy. It is even more true when the government refuses to accept pressure from anyone else. There was simply no other way to correct police behaviour, to criticise bias in the media, to ensure the removal of corrupt officials or to hope for improvements in the health service. Even the placing of a telephone kiosk on a village square was the subject of an agreement reached by a local council and a Solidarity committee which had first to threaten strike action.

If there had been a more general democratisation throughout society, involving free elections to local councils and parliament, an end to all pre-publication censorship and genuinely broad access to the media, then Solidarity would have been able to play a narrower role. Under these circumstances, it is clear that the breadth of its activities need not indicate a desire or even an ability to take power. As the opinion poll mentioned in chapter 5 showed, there were some within Solidarity who wanted a fight for 'full responsibility' within the state. Nevertheless, as other opinion surveys confirmed, it was definitely a minority view. Of 711 Solidarity members polled in Wroclaw in May 1981, 70% had no complaints about the main directions of the union's policy while 6% thought it too unwilling to make concessions and 18% thought it 'too compliant'.<sup>5</sup> That view could gain adherents as a result of the authorities' intransigence, but the 'radical' position was not elaborated into a clear strategy for how power could be taken or what its international implications would be. In fact, the union's enormous membership was united in opposition to past practices and in the desire for a voice in deciding policies. It was not united – any more than Polish society generally – in wanting a clearly defined alternative system. It was more than a traditional trade

union because, in addition to basic issues of pay and conditions, it had become the major vehicle of grass roots pressure for democratisation throughout society. That, however, did not make it a political party because it had neither the intention of taking power for itself nor a programme with which to govern the country.

### *A programme for Solidarity?*

There was, however, a growing recognition that it needed to define its role and aims more clearly. A major step towards this was made when the National Coordinating Commission of Solidarity met on 25 February 1981 and approved for general discussion a document outlining the principles for policy in the immediate future. It was in effect a draft programme for the union.<sup>6</sup>

It contained a clear justification for such an approach as it was accepted that it was impossible to defend workers' living standards without a major effort to overcome 'the economic crisis that is threatening us with disaster'. This was a new emphasis compared with the earlier, implicit line of trying to counter the alleged attempt 'to throw the costs of the crisis onto the backs of the population'. The depth of the crisis meant that, as was later admitted, that approach could only yield a 'partial success'.<sup>7</sup>

In the new document there was therefore a strong emphasis on the need for an economic reform in many respects very similar to that being proposed by the government. It was, however, claimed that there would have been no moves in this direction at all if it had not been for the emergence of Solidarity. Events apparently proved that 'the existing political system has been unable to and has not had the strength to repair itself on its own'. It therefore followed 'that economic reform in Poland will not be successful if it does not go hand in hand with a profound reform of the system of government'.

This point was reinforced by a competent exposition of the roots of the crisis which placed the emphasis on economic disasters due ultimately to 'the lack of democratic mechanisms for decision-making, the lack of accountability for decisions and of ways to replace people in executive positions'. From this followed self-evident proposals for reform many of which had by then been accepted, at least verbally, by the regime. There was also, towards the end of the document, a statement that representative bodies should be genuinely elected and that meant 'guaranteeing organisations and groups of citizens the right to nominate their own candidates' for both parliamentary and local government elections.

This was not to become the most controversial point. There were, however, soon sharp criticisms in the press of the document's economic policy proposals which showed up most clearly the weaknesses in the programme as a whole. It was caught between a recognition of the realities of the situation and an obvious desire to avoid unpopular policies. The dilemmas this led to were solved by periodically disowning a wider role in society and switching back to the extremely narrow view that a union's job is to defend the immediate interests of the working people against possible government policies and not to propose solutions to the country's problems.

The document therefore proposed that Solidarity should not work out its own programme for an economic reform. It was accepted that the situation did not allow for 'far-reaching wage and social demands in 1981' and that, if market equilibrium was to be restored, 'price increases are inevitable'. Nevertheless, it was unclear who was to bear the burden of lower living standards.

A morally convincing argument suggested that the costs should be borne primarily by high earners and particularly by those with privileges linked to positions of power. It was, however, considered possible to pay full compensation for price rises by higher earnings only to the very lowest paid. Middle earners, who make up the mass of the population, could be given only *partial* compensation. In view of the rapidly deteriorating economic situation, there would really have been no other way. Nevertheless, the document also considered advocating full compensation for the overwhelming majority of the people. It concluded that 'these two options must be widely discussed throughout the union'.

It was also very careful on the potentially explosive issue of unemployment. Even without closures due to lack of raw materials and components, the economic reform would be likely to create unemployment. Some factories might close if their products could not be sold, while others would be compelled by the discipline of the market to lay off surplus workers in a bid to keep costs down. On some estimates there might be  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million redundancies, particularly in the large numbers of office workers.

This could well have been a gross exaggeration but it was widely believed by advocates of reform. Solidarity, however, responded by insisting that 'the central authorities should bear responsibility for the full employment of all workers'. At the same time it argued that enterprises should have the freedom to decide how many workers they would employ. These two demands were irreconcilable in a period

when the legacy of past mistakes made rapid economic expansion impossible.

The determination to evade any share of responsibility for unpopular decisions was enshrined in the declaration: 'The union considers that responsibility for the results of the crisis and of reforms that are implemented rests with the state irrespective of whether the economic reforms assure the enterprises genuine independence, no matter what its form'. The state was therefore charged with the responsibility of 'protecting the population from the results of the crisis'. That looked like a slap in the face for those who hoped that workers might accept material sacrifices in exchange for genuine power.

It was also quickly seized on by the prominent journalist Jerzy Urban who, writing in *Polityka* of 2 May 1981, insisted that it was a complete mystification of the nature of the state. It is never, he argued, a completely separate body, but rather the representative of the whole of society. There was therefore absolutely no way for 'the state' to bear the costs on its own.

Urban was also highly critical of the vagueness of the document's theoretical principles. It argued that Solidarity was based on the best traditions of the nation which allegedly included Christianity, democracy and socialist social thought. The Christian influence was very obvious as Solidarity rallies typically involved a celebration of mass. Nationalism was undeniably an important factor too although both of those heritages are so broad that they can be used to justify almost any practical policies. One striking omission, however, was any conception of internationalism or of an international context. The absence of news and commentary on events around the world was the clearest distinguishing feature of the Solidarity weekly when compared with other Polish papers.

In practice Solidarity was very cautious about developing the principles for its foreign policy. It allowed the initiatives to come from other countries. That, however, meant a natural orientation towards the West as Walesa was invited to visit union centres in advanced capitalist countries. Solidarity also received unspecified amounts of financial and technical assistance from Western unions, but there were effectively no contacts with other Eastern European unions or with the World Federation of Trade Unions based in Prague. The absence of initiatives from that quarter was presumably part of the attempt by other socialist countries to cut off any possible influences from Poland, but the effect was to push Solidarity activists further towards

an attitude of contempt towards all Communists.

There was anyway no doubt that Solidarity was in no sense a Marxist organisation. It was also unclear how far it saw itself as a socialist organisation. The only working class traditions referred to in the draft programme were the events of 1956, 1970, 1976 and the strikes of the previous summer. Nevertheless, a number of formulations familiar to Marxists did appear. Moreover, it advocated equality and was particularly emphatic about the need for an adequate assured minimum income and an end to special privileges for a wealthy minority. Many of the specific demands were, even if the authors of the programme avoided making the point, quite incompatible with capitalism. The fairest assessment would seem to be that it was neither a definitely and consciously socialist organisation, nor was it anti-socialist. It had grown out of opposition to a particular model of socialism the failures of which were so dramatic that many people no longer associated anything positive with the term.

Urban, however, felt it highly significant that there was no serious attempt to recognise the advances made under socialism. This was important in view of the deep social changes and when the Polish economy had developed more rapidly than most capitalist economies, despite serious weaknesses in some sectors, and when there had been a substantial rise in living standards over the whole post-war period. By ignoring these facts the draft programme avoided noticing the positive features of socialism which were evident even in the form it had taken in Poland. Instead, the implication was that nothing worthwhile had happened until the sudden arrival of Solidarity. That had obvious implications for its attitude towards the PUWP. In fact, the document clearly implied by omission that it did not acknowledge the leading role of the party and – of greater significance for a strategy of gradual democratisation – neither was there any attempt to find common ground with those forces within the party that advocated reform. Instead, the attitude was expressed in the bold and unqualified statement that ‘Solidarity is the main guarantee for the process of renewal. There is no other social force in Poland that could replace Solidarity in that task.’

In a sense this was true because ‘renewal’ in 1980-1 was dependent on pressure from Solidarity. Urban, and others in the media who attacked Solidarity’s draft programme, could not answer that point. Nevertheless, there was an important element of justification in their criticisms. The tone of parts of the document was such as to encourage the dangerous attitude that Solidarity could, in some sense,

be the leading force in society. In practice, however, the great majority of Solidarity members had minimal political experience and certainly far less than many party members who had been critical of the regime for years, albeit without directly opposing it. It seemed that, filled with distrust towards the authorities and self confidence from their own successes, many Solidarity activists were turning their backs on important potential allies who could make an invaluable contribution to reforming Polish socialism. The draft programme was quite definitely expressing a widely-held attitude which could become a danger in any movement, and particularly in a young and inexperienced movement. It is, of course, exactly the sort of arrogance for which the dominant trend within the PUWP could quite rightly be criticised.

It was a particularly implausible position for a movement which was uncertain of its exact nature and role – definitions in the Solidarity weekly flitted between a trade union, a great movement of ‘protest and social renewal’ and ‘an independent and self-governing social and political organisation’ – and which was evolving a programme based on woolly eclecticism. Such a movement certainly had a great deal to offer as it did bring together the majority of the working people, but it could not hope to solve Poland’s problems on its own.

As we shall see, some prominent figures in Solidarity saw some of the dangers, but later attempts at systematisation of policies were in many respects a development from this first programmatic document.

#### *Self management – the new panacea?*

The period from April to July 1981 was later described as the ‘interlude for elections’. There were no major political crises while both the party and Solidarity prepared for their respective congresses. For both of them it was an opportunity to work out their policies but, while the party was a hotbed of discussion, Solidarity fell victim to creeping apathy. Election meetings in some cases, such as at Radom, were so poorly attended that they failed to reach the necessary quorum.

An immediate consequence of this was a half-hearted discussion of the draft programme in the union’s basic organisations. It was typically approved with minimal discussion, although it actually raised some difficult policy issues that had to be clarified. In the Solidarity

weekly there were a number of contributions and letters on the subject, but they too evaded the crucial issue of whether the union was going to call on its members to accept sacrifices. Typically they simply proclaimed enthusiastic approval for Solidarity and defended it against crude accusations that it was becoming too political and converting itself into an opposition party. There were a number of contributors who wanted it to take on an even wider role with, for example, more emphasis on morality and the alleged evils of alcohol. To its credit the union was in fact very active in campaigning on this point.

The apparent apathy of ordinary union members also had a direct effect on the evolution of Solidarity's thinking. By the summer of 1981 the union's leading bodies had taken shape and they were supported by a sizeable apparatus and core of activists throughout the country. These people were no longer simply reflecting the gut reactions of the mass of workers. They were trying to think out a definite strategy. The point, however, was that they could foresee a situation in which they could be outmanoeuvred by the regime and isolated from the mass of the people. They may well have been exaggerating the dangers as there was no denying widespread commitment to the broad aims and objectives of Solidarity. People did not feel the need to turn up to all its meetings to demonstrate this. Nevertheless, prominent activists increasingly saw the need to tread very carefully if they were to avoid falling victim to the general crisis of confidence afflicting so many other institutions.

There were additional grounds for their fears after the Bydgoszcz crisis when many Solidarity members began saying that they felt there *had* to be an end to the continual tension. When given time to reflect, another trip to the brink of catastrophe was an unbearable prospect. There was therefore a growing willingness to accept that *both* sides may have been at fault with Solidarity setting too short a deadline for the general strike. There was a hope that, with both sides benefiting from the experience, disputes could be settled in a more civilised way.

This, however, was by no means the universal view. The attitudes and moods of the Polish people were volatile and highly unpredictable. The unexpectedly rapid deterioration in the economic situation led from July onwards to a renewed wave of protests which this time were directed against food shortages. The initiative had not come from the Solidarity leaders, but they felt obliged to respond and they began organising street demonstrations in a number of towns when they felt that persistent calls from factories for strike action left them no

alternative. The most dramatic protest was a blockade of central Warsaw from 3 to 5 August by columns of buses which had been prevented by the police from approaching the Central Committee building.

At the same time a new force was developing within Solidarity. The factory commissions from the 15 large enterprises which were used as bases for temporary headquarters of regional organisations during the strike preparations of March 1981, organised themselves in April into a 'horizontal structure' known as the Network. Over the following months many more factory organisations affiliated and it became an important power base within the union. It was soon recognised as a consultative organ for the leadership especially on questions of economic reform and workers' self management.

It thereby brought to the centre of attention issues on which the union had earlier disclaimed any interest in formulating a policy. In this it was reflecting a powerful feeling among activists that they did *not* want to evade responsibility for economic policies. On the contrary, they wanted a say precisely so as to put things right. That was undoubtedly a closer reflection of the thinking of the mass of Solidarity members than the disclaimer in the draft programme that was intended primarily to avoid advocating unpopular policies. It was also closer to the thinking of its economic advisers.

It gave a sudden burst of renewed life to the idea of self management which, only a month or two before, many Solidarity activists had viewed with the utmost suspicion fearing that it could be a trick to incorporate the new unions into the management structure. It had, however, been pushed by leading figures in the small number of newly-elected provisional workers' councils which were often encountering intransigence and indifference from managements. This, plus the generally low respect for people in responsible positions, strengthened the demands for greater powers for workers' representatives.

This was reflected in the Network's proposals, approved at a meeting in Gdansk on 8 July, advocating the organisation of industry into 'social' enterprises which were to have independent legal status with the workers' representatives appointing the director. The central authorities would still be able to influence the economy but only by indirect means such as prices and bank loans. That could, in practice, be a very much stricter sort of control than the Network seemed to appreciate, amounting to a very severe limitation on the independence of the enterprise.

Kania, however, attacked these proposals at the party congress as 'anarchosyndicalist' and amounting to 'group ownership'. They differed from the government's proposals which clearly subordinated state enterprises to a higher body in the economic hierarchy. Nevertheless, Kania was exaggerating because it was emphasised that, in the event of dissolution, an enterprise's assets would revert to the state. He went on to accuse Solidarity of aiming to take economic power, presumably because any elected body would be dominated by its members.

In practice, so the Solidarity weekly of 31 July 1981 maintained, it was already a common practice for workers' representatives to play a major role in choosing new directors. It gave the example of a factory in Wroclaw where a committee – made up of representatives of the party, Solidarity, other unions, the next level up in the economic hierarchy and of departments within the enterprise – spent a few days selecting from 23 candidates. There were other examples too which actually suggested that cooperation between workers' representatives and the authorities was perfectly possible: both had a common interest in appointing the best managers. In a chemical factory in Torun the workers' council representing 7,600 employees chose a new director in August. He was a party member and the party's factory organisation supported the initiative.

Such incidents, however, were not given wide publicity. Instead, the issue was forced into the centre of public attention by a lengthy dispute in LOT, the Polish civilian airline. In this case, owing to its possible military significance, the government would not yield. Employees even staged a warning strike on 9 July and were preparing for indefinite strike action a few weeks later if they could not select their own director. This was narrowly averted and the dispute shifted back into negotiations.

This, plus the mounting tension over food shortages, provided the background to a crucial meeting of the National Coordinating Commission lasting from 24 to 26 July. The transcript of the most important discussion was published in the Solidarity weekly on 7 August 1981. It revealed concern among a number of leading members at apathy within the organisation, at the polarisation of positions within the leadership and, above all, at the possibility of a mistaken policy leading to a bloody confrontation and the violent suppression of Solidarity. Nevertheless, they certainly did not lack self confidence. Andrzej Celinski, the secretary to the union's Presidium, argued that the party, the government apparatus and the economic

administration were all collapsing. That meant that the union was 'in principle the only force responsible for the fate of the country'. He recognised, however, that it had neither the organisation nor the programme to lead Poland out of its crisis. It is obvious from this that he was unimpressed by the party congress. In fact it was hardly mentioned at all, although one speaker did appeal for a serious attempt to seek allies outside the union especially among those who had been involved with the horizontal structures.

The most forceful and incisive proposal, however, came from Kuron who had developed his earlier ideas into an offensive strategy for the union. He warned that the protests about food shortages could develop into a 'movement which smashes the union'. The point being that such protests could not affect the fundamental causes of the economic crisis. They therefore could not ease the pressure on living standards, and any campaign would ultimately lead to disappointment and disillusionment. It should be added that others at the meeting expressed a real fear that, if the economic situation continued to deteriorate, the government might succeed in convincing a significant section of the population that Solidarity was somehow to blame, or at least that it was a movement that offered nothing.

Kuron also warned against a fight 'for full democracy and for the abolition of pre-publication censorship'. Although he had no hesitation in saying that a 'revolution' was taking place, with the old order 'smashed' and with a government that was totally paralysed, he still insisted that the movement had 'consciously to set its own limits'. The reason for this was very simple. Otherwise 'the leadership in the USSR would see it as an immediate threat to their interests, and they would move in. I am convinced of it'.

Evidently he took the view, not shared by all members of the Solidarity leadership, that the existing government was only able to cling to power thanks to the threat of outside intervention. He was also cautious of the idea of forming a political party. The idea had been floated by some prominent figures within the Network who were preparing their so called 'secret bomb' which was to 'explode at the right moment' in the form of the Polish Labour Party. Kuron opposed this in two ways. He disliked the concept of 'the Leninist party of a new type' which he saw aiming to take power in the state. Irrespective of 'the colour of its flag', he claimed, it would end up no different from the old ruling party.

He was less opposed to the idea of a party to fight free elections, but he rejected the whole line of struggle on the grounds of setting limits

to the revolution. Instead, he could see only one way ahead. As Solidarity itself could not organise a new system, the need was for 'a new organisation of government which should not be a party but a movement of self management'. It would be a 'process of building democracy from below', and it could, in his view, be a real help in solving the economic crisis. The union would support and fight for this, but it was to be a separate and distinct movement. That view was easily supported by several other contributors to the discussion who somewhat simplistically took it for granted that the union, defending workers' immediate interests, would inevitably come into conflict with self management bodies.

Kuron's most vigorous opponent was Rulewski. He had no hesitation in defining Solidarity as 'a social and political opposition movement' and definitely not as a trade union. The implication of his contribution was that basic questions of political power should come first, although he did not actually propose a definite strategy. He was, however, very sceptical of the possibilities of self management which, he claimed, had collapsed before 'because of the natural characteristics of working people' which gave them little interest in such things. He knew this because 'one of the workers said so'. He could also claim to know about the Yugoslav experience of self management because he had spoken 'with a few Yugoslavs' and one of them had indicated that, although there were periodic elections, 'he was not well informed about what was going on'.

Probable apathy was not the only problem he foresaw. In factories where a lot of women worked 'they will never accept a dynamic director. They will probably choose a handsome man who kisses their hands'. In such a male dominated body as the Solidarity leadership, he could get away with such statements.

Although Rulewski's evidence and manner of reasoning was abysmally crude, he was making an important point. The Solidarity leadership, reflecting its lack of a firm theoretical or ideological base, had undergone a remarkably sudden conversion to the idea of self management. Nobody justified this with serious evidence that it could help to provide the organisation and programme to solve the country's crisis if both the existing authorities and Solidarity were unable to. That line was winning simply on the basis of faith.

There ought to have been benefits from introducing genuine self management, not least because it could help to restore a little confidence in the system of economic management and in the regime's sincerity, but Solidarity was soon greatly exaggerating its potential.

As an example, the front page article in the Solidarity weekly on 7 August 1981 insisted that the worsening situation was not due to 'inexorable economic laws'. Instead, it was blamed on 'inefficiency, inertia and the lack of public involvement in administration'. Self management, meaning breaking the *nomenklatura* system and taking control over the economy out of the hands of the party, was then presented as a perspective of hope.

This analysis went further than the appeal issued at the end of Commission's meeting which simply pointed to self management as one of the necessary measures for solving the crisis and, although it was understandably popular, it is wrong. It is wrong because the crisis was of such a nature than an economic reform of that sort could never produce an easy way out. The solution still ultimately depended on the willingness of the Polish people to accept sacrifices. It also gives a misleading impression of the causes of the crisis. The fundamental problem was not that party cards had enabled incompetents to fill responsible posts. The real point, as was shown in Chapter 4, was that secretiveness and an extraordinary concentration of power at the highest levels made serious mistakes in economic policy almost inevitable. Building self management from below was therefore at most an important complement to democratisation from above. Moreover, as Bugaj had pointed out before, it was more feasible from the economic point of view to start from the top as the extreme economic difficulties made a large measure of centralised control over the economy essential for the immediate future.

The analysis that Solidarity was accepting fitted with a blanket condemnation of the party as a whole. It also helped to justify a stubborn approach during negotiations which, at the government's request, were held in early August in an attempt to damp down the protests over food shortages. Urban, who participated on the government's side, described what happened in *Polityka* on 15 August 1981. The government team, led by Rakowski, were highly critical. They accused Solidarity of a destructive approach, encouraging strikes and broadening its role towards that of an opposition political party. The union leadership refused to request publicly an end to protests and it refused to support price increases. It seemed in both cases to be avoiding anything that could lose popularity. The effect was to paralyse the government which *did* need the support of the Solidarity leadership on these issues. This was made quite clear by the opinion poll of Solidarity members in Wroclaw in May which showed that only  $1\frac{1}{2}\%$  would tolerate price increases without compensation.

Over half of the 711 respondents would insist on *full* compensation.

It seemed to Urban that cooperation between the government and Solidarity was not working. The union leaders were conceding nothing and committing themselves to nothing. They were carrying on quite oblivious to the fate of the nation.

By paralysing the government they could only reduce its prestige still further. It could ultimately be threatened with collapse. It was only a small step from this to accuse them of actually aiming to take power. That suspicion could be supported by their approach to demands for higher rations. On being told that this was not possible, they demanded control over food distribution.

This could have been part of a step-by-step plan to take over the economy. It certainly would have given the union greater direct power than advocated in Kuron's general strategy. Nevertheless, the Solidarity leaders had been pushed in this direction by a government that excluded them from any share in power. They were being presented with government decisions and called on to support them. Despite that, there was still scope for agreement. On 24 August, after talks with the government had broken down, the National Coordinating Commission issued a major appeal for a two month period without marches and strikes. It even called on all union members, and especially miners and others working in export sectors, to work without pay on eight Saturdays before the end of the year. It refused to agree to the reintroduction of Saturday working in mines even though the government was prepared to pay three times the basic rate. Such a proposal was of no interest to the miners who could never have found anything to spend the extra money on.

Possibly of even greater significance was Solidarity's reluctant acceptance of a massive increase in bread prices. That was not seen as a cause for rejoicing on the government's side, because if it took that long and that much haggling over every price rise, then there could be no prospect of eliminating the market imbalance in the near future. Nevertheless, it was a sign that the Solidarity leaders were prepared to support unpopular measures.

In fact, they felt that their demands were extremely reasonable. As one of them emphasised, they were not raising the issues of parliamentary or local government elections which would have escalated the conflict. Instead, they were only raising what they felt were the minimum demands if there was to be any improvement in the economic situation. They were, of course, basing themselves on the view that any solution required taking at least some power out of the

hands of the existing economic apparatus.

Walesa himself was very emphatic that he was not out to take power or to replace the existing authorities by Solidarity, but he did want 'the authorities to serve society'. He wanted them 'subordinated to the nation'.<sup>8</sup> Rakowski, however, was unconvinced of Walesa's sincerity and could see no hope unless the 'moderates', which seemed to mean people who accepted party policy on immediate economic issues, could win at the union's congress. He was in for a big disappointment.

#### *Another inconclusive congress*

The Solidarity congress lasted for 18 days in the late summer of 1981. There were 892 delegates elected and the incomplete credentials report suggests that there had been a significant shift in the composition of the leading core of activists over the period of the union's existence. It gave details of delegates' 'social origin' which is a very inexact indicator of their own occupations. It showed a small majority from working class backgrounds but a large group, making up 28% of the total, were from intellectual backgrounds. In some parts of the country, such as Warsaw, they constituted a clear majority.<sup>9</sup> It was also revealed that more than 200 delegates worked for the union. That was much less than the Soviet claim that almost all were full time officials, but it suggests that practising manual workers may have been in a minority. That, of course, need not imply that the delegates did not represent the views of members, but it was an indication of how far the union had created a distinct core of activists.

Another important change was the drastic reduction in numbers of party members. As a whole they constituted about 6% of delegates. Their strongest position was in Gdansk where they made up 14% of the delegation. For Warsaw the figure was 2%. This was a clear indication of how the party's conception of renewal had failed to win back public confidence. In fact, it had allowed the gulf to widen possibly partly because, by offering greater say to ordinary party members, it differentiated them even more clearly from the rest of the people.

This was very clearly visible in the defiant character of the first part of the congress which, although intended to last for only three days, dragged on from 6 to 10 September. Its main task was the adoption of the union's statutes but it was frequently bogged down in procedural points, which annoyed many of the delegates, and diverted

onto immediate political controversies. The implicitly dismissive attitude towards the authorities and party was accentuated by two particular causes of bitterness at the time. One was the aggressive hostility shown by government representatives such as Rakowski who spoke on television shortly before the start of the congress. His theme was that 'my partner must not see in me an enemy', although he seemed quite prepared to see *his* potential partner – i.e. Solidarity – as his enemy. A similar line was put by Urban who insisted that there was no longer a conflict with 'forces of the old order' as they 'had all been pensioned off'. The conflict was therefore between those who wanted 'a revival of the structure of socialism' with self management and economic reform – by implication this was the party and government – and those who 'reject socialism and who would, step by step, institution by institution, take power'.

The implication that the party was pushing for all the sensible reforms appeared doubly hypocritical because of the second major source of bitterness. Solidarity was still fighting the same old battle for the right to put its case and to reply to criticisms on the television and for a daily paper. It had staged a press strike on 19 and 20 August which the government could only counter with a few papers from military presses. As a result the union won the right to produce one television programme on the evening of 1 September in which the central theme was the denial of any intention to take power and an insistence that it wanted to play a constructive role in solving the country's problem. This, however, was not followed by agreement that Solidarity should have regular broadcasts. The conflict came to a head over coverage of the first part of the congress and Solidarity ultimately refused to allow Polish television to film at all.

This must have increased the belligerence of the delegates but they were anyway bound to be in a self confident mood. Walesa, in his opening address, assured them that 'victory for Solidarity' was certain if they acted with a common purpose. They could then 'create the Poland of their dreams'. Throughout the congress there was applause for contributions such as that of Jan Kulaj, the 23 year old leader of 'Rural Solidarity', who announced that 'every Pole has been waiting 36 years for this moment for today the democratically elected representatives of the working people have come together'.

Strident partisanship was also expressed and encouraged by the repeated applause given to fraternal delegates who could give brilliantly exaggerated views of Solidarity's importance. One example was Professor Hutchinson from California who, speaking at the

second half of the congress, described its appearance as 'the greatest event in the history of trade unions in the world'. Under such circumstances, there was a very strong tendency for delegates to believe that they had all the answers.

This probably encouraged them to send their controversial message 'to the working people of Eastern Europe' which expressed support 'for those of you who have decided to follow the hard road of struggle for a free trade union movement. We believe, that before long your representatives and ours will be able to meet to exchange union experiences.'

This, although expressing a very understandable sentiment, must be judged a blunder. It made it harder inside Poland for the government to work towards good relations with Solidarity. The Soviet party leadership described it as a 'revolting provocation' while even more restrained critics inside Poland saw it as a disturbing indication of the union's international orientation.

There were delegates present from Western trade unions, including the French CGT and the Italian CGIL, but unions from most of Eastern Europe were invited only on 2 September. Sandor Gaspar of the Hungarian unions complained in a message to Solidarity that this notice was too short. He also could not accept the 'interference' in the internal affairs of other Eastern European countries alongside the total silence on the anti-union policies of Thatcher and especially Reagan who had just sacked the air traffic controllers in the USA for having the effrontery to stage a strike. Solidarity brushed this criticism aside, but it really needed any friends it could get in Eastern Europe. The Hungarian trade unions were prepared to establish contacts and, had Solidarity thought seriously about its international policy, it ought to have taken that opening very seriously indeed.

Nevertheless, the most 'extreme' position certainly did not prevail. It came into the open over a call to delete from the statutes any reference to the party's leading role. Rulewski justified this with the argument that the government was no longer capable of doing anything, so that Solidarity was the only force left that could save the country. In the event, the amendment was defeated and failed to get the necessary support of 10% of the delegates to force a secret ballot vote. The daily press carried reports of frenzied manoeuvering by Solidarity leaders to avoid an open contest on an issue that could give the authorities another opportunity to condemn the union for being too irresponsible and extreme.

There were others who argued the need to risk a 'total

confrontation' with the government, but there was no other serious challenge to Walesa's view that they must try to find a road of compromise and dialogue. He, however, also insisted that 'we have a fight before us'. It was to be more complicated than a simple direct confrontation and he used this to justify the major change in statutes to give the union a central leadership which 'must have great authority and must feel strong support from the regions'. Without a leadership able to take and enforce unpopular decisions, he argued, the union could still lose everything.

There was opposition to this from those who wanted to retain the power of the regions, but it was not obvious that the conflict reflected deeper disagreements over strategy. In the end Walesa's position was accepted.

The other important resolutions were on local government elections and self management. The first of these called on the authorities to allow political and social organisations and even 'groups of citizens' to put up candidates for the elections that were due in February 1982. That would, of course, be a very positive step towards giving the Polish people a real feeling that they had power over local authorities. The immediate response from the government was, as one would expect, very discouraging.

The resolution on self management was passed with only one vote against and one abstention. Walesa, who ended the first part of the congress with the comment that the whole event could have been worse, saw this resolution as the most significant achievement. It accused the government proposal – leaving the existing authorities with the ultimate power over appointments – of defending the *nomenklatura* system which Solidarity now believed to be the fundamental cause of the crisis. It therefore called on parliament to exercise its constitutional right to hold a referendum on the powers of self management with the unions participating in the preparation of the questions. Should this not happen, then Solidarity could organise a referendum of its own. Despite the government's claim to have a proposal supported by the majority of the people, Solidarity was pretty confident of the outcome. An opinion poll in a machine tool factory in Wroclaw with over 2,000 employees showed that over 90% supported the workers' right to appoint and dismiss the director: 9% had no opinion while 0.36% opposed the idea.<sup>10</sup>

These resolutions were obviously a shattering disappointment to the party leadership. The Political Bureau issued a statement deplored the fact that 'adventurist tendencies and phenomena', which they had

hoped were only extreme trends, had been elevated 'to the rank of the official programme of the entire organisation'. It quite incorrectly claimed that this was 'not a programme of workers affiliated in Solidarity', but the result of manipulation by 'counter-revolutionary groupings' under the influence of 'Western subversion centres'. The examples it gave were 'so called workers' defence committees and the so called Confederation of Independent Poland'.

Rakowski concluded that the idea of partnership had been buried in Gdańsk and continued to insist that there must be a silent majority of Solidarity members who would see the folly of the congress resolutions. Fortunately, he did not go as far as Tass, the official Soviet news agency, which called for strong measures to deal with union leaders who were allegedly launching a campaign to seize power. There was even a warning from CPSU Central Committee which paternalistically chided the Polish government for failing 'to take resolute steps to cut short the hostile campaign against the USSR'. The demand for repressive measures against expressions of 'anti-Sovietism' might have frightened people in Poland, but it was no way to raise the prestige of the USSR in their eyes. That has been proven by over thirty years of experience.

The implausibility of the authorities' worst fears was suddenly demonstrated when parliament acted as an arbiter and achieved a compromise just acceptable to the Solidarity leadership over the law covering powers of self management. This, alongside the laws of the socialist enterprise and on trade unions which were still in preparation, was one of the three basic elements in the economic reform. The compromise formulation, differing from the government's preferred option, stated that 'a director is appointed and recalled by the founding organ (i.e. the authorities) or workers' council'. If agreement could not be reached, then the issue was to be settled in the courts. Strategically vital enterprises were to be excluded from this, but even there a director could only be appointed after a competitive selection procedure giving a voice to the employees' representatives. It was still to be agreed by negotiation which sectors this referred to but basic industries such as power and transport – and anything relevant to defence – were almost certain to be included.

Shortly afterwards, on 26 September, the second part of the Solidarity congress began. It was meant to concentrate on electing a leadership and on adopting a programme. Outrage at the latest government agreement took up roughly two days of debate and was just one of the reasons for the congress dragging on until 7 October.

The argument was very bitter with a number of delegates still calling for the referendum on Solidarity's own self management proposals. Their case was strengthened by the revelation that only four people had been present at the Solidarity Presidium meeting that approved the agreement. One of them, Rulewski, had voted against and proposed that the congress should refuse to recognise the decision. He was opposed to any further compromises and advocated, according to the Western press reports, 'smashing the country's totalitarian system'. Even if they did not have a clear idea of where they were heading, a large number of delegates shared this blind belligerence and were prepared to believe that Walesa, strongly influenced by experts, had bludgeoned the other Presidium members into making unnecessary concessions.

There was, however, sympathy for the leadership's position and a call to release the tapes of the meeting was rejected. A number of delegates argued that the agreement was of historic significance as it was the first time that parliament had gone against the government.

That had happened despite the PUWP's absolute majority. It held 56% of the seats while the United Peasant Party held 25% and the Democratic Party 8%. 11% of MPs were non-party and among them were representatives of three small Catholic groups. It was therefore very significant that this body was showing increasing independence. Moreover, the compromise itself signified a major dent in the *nomenklatura* system.

Walesa defended his position by insisting that 'we must after all accept our position and base ourselves in the Poland which exists today. There are proposals here for smashing parliament and the government. I don't agree with that because an even worse totalitarianism would emerge in their place. We must defend ourselves against ourselves so that we cannot commit mistakes'.

This could almost have been a quote from Kuron, who, on Walesa's recommendation, was allowed to speak although not himself a delegate. He insisted that the compromise had to be accepted as otherwise the government's proposal would have been accepted and the union would have exposed itself to more hostile propaganda. Despite that, Walesa was adamant that no advisers were able to dictate the union's policy. 'We won't let anyone lead us by the nose', he proclaimed.

Even this spirited defence could not prevent a resolution insisting that the method of taking the decision was 'an infringement of the principles of union democracy' and that the functions and competence

of experts should be clearly defined in future.

This must have dented Walesa's standing when he faced a contested election for the post of chairman. His opponents were Marian Jurczyk, the strike leader from Szczecin who had attracted publicity shortly beforehand by claiming that Rakowski was not competent to be in the government, Jan Rulewski and Andrzej Gwiazda.

All of the candidates were nervous and none of their election speeches were brilliant. Jurczyk made general statements about the need to ensure that one man could not take decisions for the whole union, but he insisted that he had not thought about politics and that he was 'neither a moderate nor a so called radical'. He was, however, in favour of 'continuing with a hard course, but not with our eyes shut.' His reason for this was the lack of progress particularly on the issue of the media. He produced a lot of invective against the government which he described as a disgrace but, apart from his show of belligerence, the only claim to a real disagreement with Walesa was that he 'declared himself in favour of free elections to parliament so that power would be in the hands of the people of town and country'. Even that was ambiguous as no Solidarity leader was opposed in principle to free elections.

Gwiazda's views were pretty similar as he too implied that too much had been conceded to the government, but his delivery was less inspiring. He could not even give a good answer to the question of why he was standing. His only comment was 'because I can, being a delegate'.

Walesa, however, produced an abysmal performance which earned minimal applause. He justified it later by saying that he wanted to win on his record, but he disturbed the delegates by his extraordinary statement that he would like to leave the union as he found the work load too heavy. This, on top of the question mark over his own personal style of leadership, undoubtedly lost him votes to Jurczyk.

Rulewski put on a more entertaining display and tried to outline his general programmatic principles. He claimed that the union's main failing had been its 'illusions about a Soviet threat'. He described the Soviet Union as imperialist and questioned continued membership of the Warsaw Pact.

This section of his speech was officially censored in the Polish press. The reason, of course, was not that the Polish people are so simple that they need to be protected against such thoughts. Far stronger language could be heard as a matter of course practically anywhere in Poland. The logic of censorship had very obviously become the need

to avoid offending a hypersensitive ally. It did no credit to the regime or to the Soviet Union and could even give Rulewski greater legitimacy in his claim to be a firm opponent of the old order. Censorship can never be the way to expose a demagogue.

Nevertheless, his strong words enabled him to advocate a more radical programme than any of the other candidates. He went beyond the Network's reform proposals and called for industrial property to be 'divided up and given back to the working people'. That would, he claimed 'create a new cultural model in our society'.

It is unclear what this was intended to mean as it was not worked out in detail, but he did talk of decentralised accountability in the economy as a way to increase workers' involvement. Neither is it clear how seriously Rulewski believed in it. His conversion to any thoughts of self management had been remarkably sudden and an ambiguous comment after the election result suggested that he might need to think up a new programme for the next leadership contest.

In the event, Walesa won with 55% of the votes cast, against 6% for Rulewski, 9% for Gwiazda and 24% for Jurczyk. 6% of the ballot papers were either spoilt or unmarked. It was no surprise that Walesa won easily, but this result left no doubt that many delegates were dissatisfied either with him personally or with his strategy of agreements and compromises with the government.

He did, however, express satisfaction with the new leading body, renamed the National Commission, which was elected in a protracted process at the end of the congress. The Presidium had 18 members and none of Walesa's election opponents were elected to it. There were a number of new faces there and the average age was only 34. By their original occupations almost all were intellectuals. Of the remaining 82 National Commission members, 70% were originally non-manual workers: it was not clear how many worked full time for the union. There was only one woman, a 46 year old doctor from Plock. The only party member elected was Bogdan Lis, the 29 year old vice-chairman of Gdansk Solidarity who had been a prominent figure in the leadership from the beginning of the August strike. Even he was only just elected and failed to get onto the Presidium.

The policies that this new leadership would pursue remained an open question. The first part of the congress had appointed 13 discussion groups to work out ideas on particular themes. These were then to report back with ideas that provided the basis for a programme resolution which was accepted at the end of the congress by 455 votes to 65 with 91 abstentions.<sup>11</sup> It would, however, be very

dangerous to assume that it would automatically provide the basis for policy. That depends on how far it avoided ambiguous generalities and, above all, on how far it had been genuinely discussed, understood and agreed to by leading Solidarity activists. There was, however, no doubt that the union's thinking had evolved significantly since the spring. There was slightly more clarity on the nature of the organisation which the document described as 'combining within itself features of a trade union and of a great social movement'. There was a change in that it apparently drew its inspiration 'from Christian ethics, from our national traditions and also from the workers' and democratic traditions from the world of labour'.

This time, then, socialist traditions were omitted. There was certainly no hint of acknowledging a leading role for the party. In fact, in the discussion group concerned with relations with the government and the PUWP the main argument was over whether agreement with the authorities was possible at all. Everyone present accepted that, in the absence of wider democratisation throughout society, Solidarity could not restrict itself to the role of a traditional trade union. The 'fundamentalists', however, went much further than that. They claimed to base themselves on the Marxist conception of class struggle, arguing that 'the party apparatus has become a new ruling class', because, they said, it holds political, economic and ideological power.

It is reassuring to know that there were Solidarity members interested in Marxism but, as has been argued earlier, this particular interpretation is shallow and unconvincing. It led the 'fundamentalists' to oppose any attempt at compromise with the government because they said that the trend was towards the demolition of existing structures and that it would lead to isolation from the 'radicalised masses'. Andrzej Rozpłochowski, a 31 year old steel worker from Katowice, was the only vigorous supporter of this position to be elected to the new National Commission. During the congress he called for the liquidation of the party's workplace organisations claiming that they were 'one of the main causes of the crisis'.

The 'pragmatists' argued against this insisting that compromise was essential to hold the union together. They thereby gave a very different justification for limiting their demand from Kuron's, although fears of a Soviet invasion could, of course, have been one of the major factors encouraging 'moderate' attitudes in the population generally. Following on from their assessment of people's thinking, the 'pragmatists' advocated looking for immediate steps to 'reform', but

not to 'smash' the system. They also doubted the relevance of a programme which, for example in Modzelewski's view, was aimed for a Marxist sect rather than a massive national movement of nearly 10 million members.

The only real attempt at a sympathetic appraisal of the party in the congress was a speech by PUWP member Piotr Ejsmont from Gdańsk. He argued against the simplistic but popular view that rejected it in total. It was certainly not a monolith and there were a lot of differences, he pointed out, among prominent individuals such as Olszowski, Kania, Bratkowski and the likes of Bogdan Lis. Moreover, a number of other leading Solidarity activists, and important advisers such as Kuron, had developed their thinking while in the party. It is impossible to know what practical political conclusion Ejsmont intended to draw from this because his speech was cut short by a sudden commotion as union election results were brought into the hall.

The 'pragmatists' easily won the argument. The programme resolution made it absolutely clear that progress had to be gradual so that each step could first gain the support of the population, because 'the nation will not forgive anyone ... if their activities lead to the shedding of blood'. On another important issue, however, their approach came under fire. Congress accepted the wording that change was to be achieved 'without disrupting international alliances', but the initially proposed wording 'without disrupting the alliance with the USSR' was rejected. It was also very noticeable that there was no attempt to argue in favour of the Warsaw Pact. It was simply accepted as a fact of life. That says a lot about how low the standing of the Soviet Union had sunk. Twenty five years before, plenty of Poles could see it as a very necessary ally against a remilitarised West Germany. By 1981 the alliance was acknowledged out of fears of Soviet invasion and after warnings from Walesa that oil supplies could easily be cut off.

Nevertheless, it was still accepted that the road to reform was to be a series of 'agreements', as had been the practice since August 1980. That ruled out any thoughts of a direct, total confrontation, but Solidarity was still very ambitious about the extent of change it was hoping for. Having firmly accepted a major responsibility for the fate of the nation its programme resolution, unlike the draft produced in February, had to cover all important aspects of social life.

Its central theme was the fight against arbitrary power which was to be replaced by 'self management'. This term had acquired the extraordinarily broad meaning of 'a rebuilding of the structure of the

state and the creation and reinforcement of independent and self-governing institutions in all spheres of social life'. At the highest level it meant converting parliament into 'the highest authority in the state', and changing the electoral system to allow 'all political parties, social organisations and groups of citizens freely to propose candidates'.

There was, however, no call for immediate parliamentary elections, although the issue had been raised by a number of prominent speakers throughout the congress. The only issues of real urgency in the crucial section 'The Self-managing Republic' were the demand for a new procedure for local government elections and the call to bring to justice those responsible for the shooting of workers and other brutal acts of repression in the past – including Bydgoszcz in 1981 – and those whose activities in the 1970-80 period had brought the country to economic ruin. Even when demanding greater access to the mass media, the resolution included no categorical demands and presented the authorities with no deadlines.

This section of the document caused consternation in the party leadership but for immediate practical policies the most important and controversial section concerned the crisis and economic reform. The attendance at the earlier discussion groups had been poor with less than half those chosen turning up. The document they produced reiterated the commitment to economic reform and self management to be based on 'social enterprises run by the employees represented through a workers' council'.

It was, however, quickly apparent that there was a deep division among those who attended the meetings over how far such changes could really solve the immediate crisis. This time the difference was between 'optimists' who thought a rapid improvement was possible and 'pessimists' who thought economic decline would continue for some time. Among the 'pessimists' there were even some who were prepared to accept the government's recently published programme.

The differences came into the open when Bugaj, himself a 'pessimist', presented the conflicting views to the congress. Stefan Kurowski, an economist who had fallen from official favour in the Gomulka period, then argued for his own programme. He claimed that a 'radical conversion' of the economy could 'lead to a renewed rapid growth in national income'. This could be achieved by cutting investment and arms spending and transferring resources from the state to the private sector in agriculture and services. Mining was to be helped by more labour and the foreign debt was to be dealt with by 'a revision of our trade agreements ... to negotiate better terms'. An

alternative was to join the IMF, a possibility which was seen as at least worth investigating by all the main participants, and which was being discussed very seriously in government circles too.

All this made it sound incredibly easy and some similar ideas – such as switching resources ‘from tanks to washing machines’ – were fully supported at the congress. Kurowski did not emphasise at the time that even his proposal demanded sacrifices. It referred to restoring market equilibrium by compulsory loans and price increase with compensating pay increases only for the worst off. Grzegorz Palka, a 31 year old economist from Lodz Polytechnic who was one of the signatories to Kurowski’s proposal, even produced a proposal from Lodz to overcome the market disequilibrium by ‘a large increase in the price of meat with compensation only for those families living below the social minimum’. Some delegates picked this up, but all the attention centred on Kurowski’s claim to ‘guarantee a rapid way out of the crisis’. He expressed amazement that ‘so competent an economist as Ryszard Bugaj did not include these obvious propositions in the draft of the union’s programme’. The congress evidently agreed. Kurowski’s optimism was exactly what they wanted to hear and he was greeted with tremendous applause. All the eligible signatories to his programme were elected to the National Commission and Palka was returned to the Presidium, with the special responsibility for negotiating with the government on economic questions.

Bugaj, despite the prominent role he played throughout the congress, failed to get elected by a large margin. He insisted that the Kurowski plan was not new and warned against creating ‘dangerous illusions’. Its greatest weakness, albeit only one of many, was the absurd assumption that Poland was in some sort of position of strength able to dictate terms to its trading partners. The utter naïvety of this had been made clear at the discussion group’s meeting on 20 September by Professor Witold Trzeciakowski. Reporting the views of Western Banks and Reagan’s advisers, he could reveal that further loans to Poland were very unlikely and depended on Solidarity reaching an agreement with the government. Kurowski’s totally unrealistic view could be given credence by the continuing insistent distrust of official information. A representative of dockers on the Baltic coast claimed to have accumulated evidence that government statements on foreign trade figures were false while Marian Jurczyk could insist that the fundamental problem was in trade deals not based ‘on healthy principles’. It was easy for the delegates to guess which partner he

thought had been cheating.

Bugaj's 'realistic variant' hinged on the statement; 'we consider it our duty to state openly that there is no miracle cure'. It was, inevitably, an uninspiring document as it was based on a recognition of the depressing realities. So, for example, there was no bland assertion that problems in mining could be overcome. Instead, the government and the unions were to try together to work out how to raise output.

There was no belief in a panacea from self management, or from breaking the *nomenklatura*, although Bugaj and his colleagues certainly advocated democratisation in the economy. There was, however, full recognition of the real need to restrict the level of demand. This definitely meant union members making sacrifices, and a number of price increases were proposed for immediate approval at the congress. Petrol was to go up without compensation, alcohol with compensation only 'for the families of alcoholics' and 'luxury' goods such as cars and televisions were to be brought to their equilibrium prices within a year. This differed from the government's proposals because the increases were to be smaller – possibly too small to solve the problem – and they were to be combined with agreement on a total package for economic reform.

In the final document, both of these proposals were included so that they could become 'the subject of discussion inside the union'. Alongside them was yet another which made very few concrete suggestions but insisted that there were enormous reserves of initiative and enterprise which, once released by an economic reform, could become a major force in solving the crisis. Fortunately, there was no mention there of the proposals worked out by the Confederation of Independent Poland and presented to the congress by a delegate from Radom. It still believed that the costs of the crisis could be borne by those responsible for the mistakes of the past and advocated 'withholding pensions to those responsible for the crisis (especially members of the PUWP)'. It even made the ludicrous suggestion that Poland's currency should be made freely convertible. The immediate consequence of that would have been a flood of imports and rapidly rising unemployment with absolutely no compensating increase in exports. The fate of this proposal helped to underline the distance most of the Solidarity leaders had covered since the spring and also to demonstrate the inaccuracy of the Political Bureau statement about who was setting the union's policies.

All this, however, indicates how difficult it was to reach agreement

on economic policies. It was a major advance to get at least formal agreement that sacrifices would have to be made. The main text, however, was very cautious on the details, arguing that the method for restoring market equilibrium could only be decided 'after a public discussion, by means of a referendum of the whole nation'. It also held firm that there should be no unemployment. It would apparently be possible to enable people whose jobs were disappearing to work short time without a reduction in pay. Although there was no longer a serious *theoretical* argument for Solidarity to avoid demanding sacrifices — as there had been when it saw itself in the narrowest possible trade union role — it was still very clear that its activists were not happy about advocating unpopular measures.

In the meantime, it was accepted that the government's programme was unacceptable not because of agreement on possible faults in its analysis but because 'it does not arouse public confidence'. That leads back to wider issues of democracy as only a government with genuine trust could hope to implement a policy involving such enormous sacrifices.

It therefore remained an open question exactly how Solidarity's economic thinking would develop. The issues had been aired and discussed, and that was a great step forward. Nevertheless, attention had centred on an unrealistically optimistic proposal and price increases remained a highly explosive and emotive issue. This point was underlined at the end of the Solidarity congress when a sudden increase in cigarette prices brought the gathering to the brink of calling for a general strike.

Although this sounds like an absurd reaction from an organisation that was highly critical of the government's failings in health policies, it was made very much more likely by the way the measure was implemented. Even at the PUWP Central Committee on 16 October Ryszard Kucharski of the Warsaw car factory indicated that many of the workers felt very bitter because government ministers had spoken to them shortly beforehand without even mentioning the issue. There was no plausible reason for evading consultation — or as a minimum gesture giving prior warning — as panic buying is impossible for goods that are almost unobtainable already. That could only make the road to the restoration of some public confidence in the regime, and hence to an agreement between Solidarity and the government, even harder.

That, however, does not mean that the road to economic recovery was blocked. During the autumn of 1981 the government continued to implement price increases with the objective of gradually eliminating

the need for state subsidies while simultaneously restoring balance in the market. The Minister for Finance claimed that one third of the imbalance was removed before the introduction of martial law. Solidarity activists continued to protest but when, for example, the price of alcohol was raised, they wisely stepped back from strike action. As Walesa pointed out, the strikes of August 1980 had been successful partly because all sales of alcohol were banned by the strikers in the Gdansk area. A strike in November 1981 would therefore have been 'the best means to break the union. This time, the world will say: That's the end if they're striking for vodka.'

## NOTES

1. Translated in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, IV, 4-6.
2. *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 11 September 1981, supplement, p.5.
3. *ibid.*, 9 October, 1981.
4. M. Johnstone, *Morning Star*, 10 July 1981.
5. *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 31 July 1981.
6. *ibid.*, 17 April 1981, supplement.
7. *ibid.*, 11 September 1981, supplement, p.3.
8. Interview in *Marxism Today*, October 1981.
9. This information, and all the direct quotes from congress delegates, are from *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 11, 18 and 25 September and 2 and 9 October 1981.
10. *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 31 July 1981.
11. *ibid.*, 16 October 1981, supplement.

## 8 The Road to Martial Law

### *The October Central Committee meeting*

On 16 October, shortly after the Solidarity congress, the party's Central Committee assembled in Warsaw. If some of its earlier meetings had been depressing and pessimistic, this time many of the speakers were almost on the point of despair.<sup>1</sup>

Kania delivered the opening address which amounted almost to an admission of helplessness. He referred to a broad 'anti-Soviet' campaign that was gaining strength and becoming, in his view, a major threat to the nation's interests. The theme was taken up by Albin Siwak who expressed horror at cartoons he had seen on public display in some Silesian coal mines.

Examples of the Solidarity propaganda that was frightening party leaders were given in a Reuter report of 3 November after its correspondent had visited the union's Warsaw headquarters. A mock theatre poster carried the caption 'ECONOMIC DISASTER – TRAGEDY, PRODUCED, WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY THE POLISH COMMUNIST PARTY. NOW IN ITS 36TH GREAT YEAR.' There were posters commemorating Katyn and badges for sale with the captions 'Albin Siwak – Superstar' and 'Soviet Tanks – No Thanks'. There were even Solidarity members wearing badges proclaiming 'I love the Soviet Union'.

More disturbing to the regime was a caricature of Brezhnev that appeared in a local Solidarity paper. The editor was charged with libel against the head of a friendly state, but it had proved difficult in the past to press such charges. The Solidarity leadership did not approve of the cartoon but neither did it see it as a crime. It continued to defend the right to free expression and to resist the censorship of its publications whenever possible.

Kania, however, following persistent pressure from the Soviet leadership, was understandably concerned. He was also frightened by a worsening of the economic situation, with strikes and demonstrations spreading throughout the country. He concluded that the 'rightist trend' within Solidarity was consciously and deliberately blocking the government's efforts by, for example, rejecting the proposed anti-crisis measures and by opposing ideas to raise coal output, although the

union was merely expressing the view of the great majority of miners. This to Kania, however, was further evidence for the existence of a scheme to cause economic catastrophe and then to take the opportunity to seize power.

This simplistic view of Solidarity's aims was reflected in his conclusion that the organisation was being converted into an anti-socialist, opposition party. The call for a 'self managing republic' was condemned as aiming for 'the liquidation of socialism in Poland'. This is a revealing indication of how Kania understood socialism, as that section of the Solidarity programme was concerned with the need for 'self-management, democracy and pluralism', all of which were principles verbally accepted by the party leadership. Apart from advocating free elections for all those in positions of power, starting in places of work, it called for the independence of culture and education from state censorship, for changes in the legal system to ensure that it was under the control of society, and for a clearer definition of the powers of the police and security forces.

It certainly could be criticised on points of detail and for the jumble of ideas it contained in the style so typical of Solidarity. It included, for example, amid ideas on how to ensure public control over those in power, a proposal to work to eliminate 'alcoholism and addiction to narcotics and nicotine among young people'. Nevertheless, its general principles must be seen as an essential part – and in fact one of the great potential benefits – of socialism.

Kania's analysis of the Solidarity congress was entirely negative. He concluded that its leaders belonged ideologically 'to a different world, to the West', and that counter-revolutionaries had gained the dominant influence. He failed to appreciate the social roots of Solidarity's militancy or to recognise the contradictory and unclear nature of the congress.

Militancy was continually fuelled partly by the worsening economic situation but partly also by the party's failures. Not once had its organisations been able visibly to initiate changes. Instead, even when the leadership had conceded and signed agreements, it had repeatedly failed to keep its side of the bargain. An obvious example was the failure to bring to trial the guilty policemen of Bydgoszcz. That created an ideal issue for any 'extremist' to exploit.

There certainly were a lot of highly belligerent contributions at the Solidarity congress. The party's influence had become minimal and the alliance with the Soviet Union was questioned. Nevertheless, there was also a great fear of forcing a major confrontation. Solidarity,

despite such views as Rulewski's, still intended to proceed by a series of agreements. Moreover, despite a lot of naïvety in economic policies, its programme did not rule out cooperation in tackling the economic crisis.

Although Kania still acknowledged that there were different trends within Solidarity, his central theme was forceful condemnation of the leadership and policies of the union that had come to represent the overwhelming majority of the working class. He concluded that it was impossible to belong both to the party and to an organisation which was its 'enemy'. The meeting began with the expulsion of Bogdan Lis from the party and during its course 11 members, including Zofia Gryzb, announced that, as of that day, they were resigning from Solidarity. Some others stayed in for the time being. An example was Edward Banicki, a fitter in a railway equipment factory who defiantly claimed that he had helped to organise the union in his workplace, although he too accepted that he probably would resign in the near future.

Kania, however, having painted so depressing a picture of the situation, had real trouble producing a convincing proposal for the future. He wanted to continue by 'dialogue and agreement' and referred to the idea of broadening the regime's political base with a new Front of National Understanding. It was hard to see how that could help when he had implicitly argued that agreement with Solidarity was impossible.

Contributions throughout the meeting made it clear that Kania's speech, and in fact his whole style of leadership, could inspire no confidence. Particularly the representatives of big factories pointed to growing despair and a new wave of mass resignations from the party, leaving basic organisations 'near to total disintegration'.

One important source of discontent remained the economic situation. One speaker reported how a delegate to a conference in his steel works had arrived late justifying this on the grounds that for some days he had been queuing for meat. By the day of the conference he was nearing the front and he could hardly drop out then. Such shortages were the consequence of a 14% drop in meat production plus the limited resources for supplementary imports and, especially, of Solidarity's refusal in August to trust official figures and therefore to agree to a cut in rations to balance with supply.

Generally, however, there was deep disappointment that party leaders were not coming to speak in the factories and that was reducing the credibility of ordinary party activists. There were

frequent references to the wide gap between the leadership and ordinary members and both Kania and Olszowski came in for some sharp criticism. Zofia Stepien, a worker in a linen factory in Czestochowa, expressed a widespread feeling when she said; 'I don't know whether you, comrade first secretary, just like us in the factories have a hard job for the party as they hurl insults at us for the crisis in the country, for our powerlessness and for our ineffectiveness. They also reproach us because they say that they don't see you, that you don't want to speak to the nation ...' Instead, the leadership was allegedly preoccupied with appointing commissions that solved nothing and appeared irrelevant to the mass of workers. There were even renewed complaints that ideas on economic reform had never been explained in a way that people could understand.

Inevitably, Central Committee members had to try to find an alternative. Zofia Stepien reported that many workers were saying that Grabski might have been right after all. It was certainly quite clear that the party was failing abysmally. Others reverted to the need to identify and punish those who had caused the crisis in the first place.

Behind this confusion and demoralisation, there were still sharp disagreements on how to proceed. Among those favouring a tough approach was Andrzej Gdula, party secretary from Bielsko-Biala, who saw two possible roads. One was to continue with the line of the Ninth Congress, although his assessment of the situation suggested that it would fail. The alternative was a state of emergency. That meant 'abandoning reforms and the broadening of democracy and civil liberties' in the full awareness of the likely consequence of such a step, but it could 'guarantee the basic means for life, peace and law and order'.

Most other speakers evaded the issue while a minority expressed horror at the idea of using force, but there was no sign of a new approach that could have made an agreement with Solidarity foreseeable.

Rakowski was conspicuously subdued, perhaps no longer able to see a non-violent solution. While there were 72 others contributing to the discussion, he said nothing. There were some reports of signs of a revival of horizontal structures and of calls for more discussion within the party, but they were firmly rejected. Kania's view that the party had taken its decisions at its congress and now needed the maximum unity to implement them was not challenged, although there were criticisms of his proposal for a screening of the party's membership to

turn it into a 'bastion of struggle against the enemies of socialism'. If, however, his policy was widely accepted as the only possible one, then the worsening situation had to be blamed on the leadership's failure to act energetically in implementing that policy. This was a common theme throughout the Central Committee meeting.

Attacks on Kania, who was strongly criticised by fellow Political Bureau member Olszowski, led him to offer his resignation. This was accepted in a secret vote by 104 votes to 79. The Political Bureau then unanimously proposed General Jaruzelski who was elected First Secretary by 180 votes to 4. Thus ended the experiment of electing a party leader at a full congress.

Jaruzelski made it clear that this was not intended to mark a major policy change, but the resolution adopted at the meeting was pretty tough. It made no reference to the earlier idea of a party screening but among its controversial points were a call to workers to work even on free Saturdays, if they had the necessary raw materials, and a proposal to put to parliament for a law 'temporarily' limiting the right to strike.

It also laid down, in effect, conditions for Solidarity if it was to be accepted into the new National Front. They included respect for the constitution, rejection of 'the enemies of socialism', an immediate suspension of strike action, co-operation with the government's economic programme and an end to the 'anti-Soviet campaign'. It was also made clear that Solidarity would have to agree to renegotiation of agreements that had been signed in the past. Presumably that referred particularly to the economic promises that were obviously beyond the authorities' power to keep.

It was therefore possible for commentators in the Polish press to argue that Jaruzelski's appointment *confirmed* the line of understanding as outlined at the special congress. Nevertheless, it could not be denied that that line was coming under very serious threat. Moreover, despite Jaruzelski's prestige in the country, the change of leadership could not overcome the party's fundamental problems. Although he did appear in some workplaces, he could hardly hope to reestablish the broken links between the leadership and the workers. He came from a wealthy background and had found himself in the USSR after Poland's destruction in 1939. Almost all his subsequent experience was in the army. His appeal was the mystique of a soldier rather than the charisma of a mass political leader. Moreover, he had nothing to tell the people that could reassure them.

The change was therefore just one more step along the party's road

of retreat. Instead of trying to win back some credibility, it was hiding behind the prestige of the army and of its commander.

The October Central Committee meeting left one man holding the posts of Prime Minister, Defence Minister and party First Secretary. Key sectors of the economy were also being run by ministers who came from the armed forces and soldiers were used during the autumn in villages to help keep food and fuel supplies moving and to prepare for the coming winter. Their presence was particularly important because rumours were spreading in factories about peasants causing greater shortages by hoarding food. Both Rural Solidarity and the peasants on the party's Central Committee strongly denied that this was the root of the problem and pointed instead to the difficulties in agriculture due to shortages of fuel and materials — a view that was confirmed by government statements — but there were even some calls for forming requisitioning parties. Over 800 small army detachments were allocated to villages where they stayed for a month and were well received as they could get goods that had previously been unobtainable. Bit by bit the army was becoming increasingly involved in the normal life of the country.

That was to prove more important than the other novelty of the Central Committee meeting, the proposal for a new National Front. Other parties responded positively to the idea, and Pax publicly announced its support for a great coalition of three forces, the party, Solidarity and the church. DiP held a press conference on 15 October advocating the same solution and Kuron was quoted as putting forward the idea of a broad coalition government, although he later denied in any way favouring Solidarity's direct participation in power.

The party leadership, of course, had a different conception. It laid down terms for participation and saw Solidarity as only one out of a number of organisations in the proposed front which was also to be open to other parties, trade unions and representatives of Pax. Solidarity's response was not encouraging. The offer in no way corresponded to its actual position in society which justified, in Walesa's view, at least a right of veto alongside the two other main forces — the church and the government. Moreover the meaning of the party conditions was made clear when, on 20 and 21 October, violence erupted in the streets of two of Poland's cities. In Katowice the police moved in on a Solidarity propaganda van bearing the slogan 'freedom for political prisoners' while in Wroclaw they confiscated a loudspeaker van broadcasting satirical songs. Both had been tolerated for some time before and the repressive acts were opposed by

protesting crowds that were violently broken up by the police. For the first time since the appearance of Solidarity there had been significant clashes on the streets.

This, however, was not yet the end of the road of agreement. The draft law banning strikes and, as it later emerged, also giving the government the power to impose martial law, was presented on 28 October. Parliament met two days later and Jaruzelski's opening address referred in general terms to the need for emergency powers. There was, however, such strong opposition from a number of MPs, even including PUWP members, that the proposal was shelved. Once again parliament was acting with independence to put off a major confrontation.

#### *A new basis for agreement?*

All this had a sobering effect on some of the leaders of Solidarity, but the union's first response to the October Central Committee meeting was certainly not to jump at the opportunity to join a new coalition arrangement. In fact, it had already become clear that the newly elected leadership was finding it very difficult to agree on policy or to command unquestioning respect among the union's members. Instead, it was still finding itself pushed into supporting actions that were being decided on at much lower levels. The most important were protests against alleged victimisation of Solidarity members and against food shortages and at one time in October about 250,000 workers were on strike. This was a major factor pushing the National Commission into calling for a one hour national protest strike on 28 October.

Nevertheless, it was impossible for the 'radicals' to oppose discussions with the government. There was no obvious support for Jurczyk who, in another of his unfortunate and ill-judged public statements, suggested to a meeting of Solidarity activists that he was willing to face an armed confrontation with the authorities. He was later reported making a number of blood-thirsty statements, but the reliability of the reports is unclear. He was, however, strongly criticised at the Solidarity National Commission meeting of 3 and 4 November for saying 'three quarters of the Polish government are Jews who are the enemies of our state'. He did not deny using these words.

There were, however, strong protests when it was suddenly announced that Walesa was about to hold tripartite discussions with Jaruzelski and Archbishop Glemp who had replaced Wyszynski as

Primate after the latter's death in May.

Walesa easily handled the situation with the caustic remark 'Let's pass a resolution: the National Commission does not want talks with the Primate and with Jaruzelski. Sign that resolution and go with it to your workplace.'<sup>2</sup>

The talks themselves had an obvious symbolic significance and were a vital step towards a possible lasting agreement. Nevertheless, although it was agreed that there would be further meetings, there was certainly no immediate breakthrough. That meant that Solidarity was forced to respond to further criticism that it was not serious about reaching an agreement. Its Presidium issued a special statement on 6 November insisting that it remained loyal to the agreements of August 1980 and, as its programme stated, to the Polish constitution. It also claimed that 'it is and will be ready to make concessions and seek compromises justified by the supreme good of the whole Polish society'. It even passed a motion condemning the National Commission's decision only to suspend strike action. Instead, it issued a straight forward call to end all industrial action.

On this basis the promise of the tripartite discussion began to be realised and a new round of talks was started with the government. These were to last for three months and, it was hoped, would lay the basis for a new and genuine national agreement.

The Solidarity Presidium made its position public in a statement on 17th November. It argued that solving economic problems required 'a change in the whole of public life. The agreements of 1980 have not been reflected in the structures of public power or in the system of representation'. In particular, there was no 'effective social control over government decisions'.

In effect, Solidarity was demanding the implementation of its conception of a self managing republic. It accepted, as changes had to be implemented by agreement, that not everything could be achieved at once. Nevertheless, six areas were picked out for discussion. These were the creation of a Social Council for the Economy, the issue of access to the mass media, economic reform, free elections in local government, reform of the legal system and reform of the price system.

Solidarity was undoubtedly right to emphasise that government bodies had to command public confidence. It was hardly plausible for the party leaders to expect Walesa to accept unpopular economic measures and then go to the factories and persuade workers not to strike. Kania, as we have seen, was unprepared even to try. Walesa

could have hoped for success only when workers felt that they were being consulted and could begin to believe official statements on the economic situation.

Put in this context the idea for a new economic organ was attractive. The 'moderate' argument was presented in Bugaj's 'realistic' variant of Solidarity's economic programme and by Witold Trzeciakowski in the Solidarity weekly of 11 December 1981. It was to be genuinely independent of the government and to include elected representatives of professional bodies and of Solidarity and the church. Its members were, however, not to be mandated: they were to reach their own conclusions and it obviously could be a great boost if they agreed with the government. Its job was to make positive proposals on economic policy and it could undertake independent research of public opinion and even conduct referenda on the main objectives of economic policy. It could thereby fulfill some of the functions of a separate chamber of parliament without having so great a status and without requiring so elaborate a constitutional change.

Trzeciakowski emphasised that the need for such a body arose from the fact that the economic crisis could only be overcome if people were prepared to accept major sacrifices. That, however, was still not fully accepted within Solidarity and it was not made clear in the statement of 17th November. This was a major weakness that inevitably heightened the government's suspicions. It – and many Solidarity activists too – could see the new economic body becoming an instrument for *blocking* necessary economic measures. In the proposal Palka presented to the government on 15 October, the unions were to decide on how the council was to be formed and that was interpreted as giving them the power of veto. Referenda could negate decisions of parliament and the whole idea was described by the government's negotiators as part of a plan to paralyse the government prior to overthrowing it completely.<sup>3</sup>

The government counter-proposal was therefore for a mixed body that would include Solidarity alongside government appointees. Its main concern was to persuade Solidarity to accept joint responsibility for the fate of the government's economic programme. Although there was a wide gulf between these two proposals, an agreement could have been reached if both sides were determined and willing to make concessions.

This was being pushed at the time as Solidarity's main demand, but the discussions themselves quickly reached deadlock on other points as well. Both sides agreed that progress was slow and it was made

even more difficult by the large number of new and inexperienced Solidarity negotiators. In essence, the government was interested in immediate negotiations on price increases and a total stoppage to strike activity. Other points were either rejected or postponed. Solidarity, however, could not accept price increases without agreement on a full programme of economic reform.

This certainly need not have been the end of the road. There was still scope for a compromise.

#### *Jaruzelski chooses confrontation*

Nevertheless, the Central Committee reassembled on 27 November for a fateful meeting that adopted an even tougher resolution than that at the previous meeting. The scene was set by Jaruzelski's opening address in which he insisted that there were only two roads left. One led, by way of escalating strikes, via anarchy, illegal acts and economic deterioration into a final confrontation. He was not yet suggesting that this would come quickly and there was certainly no hint that civil war might be imminent. The other, the road of 'national understanding' led to a gradual recovery from the crisis. It was, however, said to be absolutely essential to put an end to all strikes and to prepare for a state of emergency. That, of course, could never be achieved by 'understanding'. The real issue was therefore whether to provoke a confrontation or to try to put it off. Having decided that it was ultimately inevitable, Jaruzelski opted for the former course. He managed to carry the meeting with him and the final resolution called on all PUWP MPs to support the proposed emergency powers bill as the only means to prevent the destruction of the republic.

Part of the justification for this confrontationist approach was the alleged continuation of a number of industrial disputes. *Trybuna Ludu* carried regular lists and pointed out that they had all been organised by Solidarity leaders. That, of course, is not adequate proof of who was really to blame. Neither was it sufficient for Jaruzelski to insist that there was a clear 'disproportion between the significance of the conflict and the fact of strikes'.<sup>4</sup> That was perfectly true, but it still needed two sides to make a conflict.

The authorities were particularly keen to play up disputes that erupted *after* the meeting of Jaruzelski, Walesa and Glemp on 4 November. The most important was a strike paralysing the majority of universities that began as an action in solidarity with Radom. The old Principal, army colonel Michal Hebda, had been re-elected by a

method that allowed one vote for every student and employee. He was a controversial figure with a good academic record but an autocratic style and, amid a great deal of mutual bitterness, Solidarity and the Independent Union of Students had been excluded from the discussions on how the election should be organised. This went against a clear stipulation from the Ministry. The electoral method itself was unusual – typically students' votes counted for less than those of academic staff – and was likely to be unfavourable to Solidarity which claimed 500 members out of the 1000 employees while the Independent Union of Students had only 200 members out of 1,430 students.

Solidarity called for a boycott of the election, in which 50% of those eligible voted, and called for an occupation strike on 28 October when the Minister had continued to insist that the election was valid. The majority of students were not involved until a general meeting was blocked by the Principal declaring the day to be a holiday so that everyone should go home. He thereby ensured that even many of those who had accepted him were turned into his opponents.

Even before that the Solidarity leadership had accepted the justifiability of the conflict, emphasising that it caused no direct economic harm, and called on the government to start talks at once. There was, however, in this case more than in many others, a very powerful argument that the conflict was unnecessary. Complaints about the electoral procedure are trivial compared with the enormous advance represented by the fact of the election itself. Hebda may have been unsuited to heading an academic institution, but Solidarity could have tried to prove that by contesting an election. Its reluctance to do so stemmed, so its opponents argued, from a fear that it might not win. As an article in its own journal accepted, it was 'disregarding students and not taking into account that they could be an ally'.<sup>5</sup> That is a sad failing for an organisation that advocated democracy.

It makes the spread of strikes to involve, according to PAP, half a million students and lecturers the more surprising. One reason must have been the general feeling of opposition that made people willing to take part in protest actions. The other underlying factor was an attempt to change the proposed new higher education law to eliminate the remaining ministerial control over curricula and to give explicit recognition to the need for expression of different world outlooks.

Nevertheless, whatever Solidarity's faults the fact remains that by the end of November there were only two strikes in any way related to

industry. One was of coal transporters in Grudziadz, a small town with 90,000 inhabitants, while another affected an enterprise in the oil and gas industry in Krosno. Conflicts listed in *Trybuna ludu* were intended as proof 'of the real' intentions of the leading bodies of Solidarity'. In fact, the picture was not very frightening at all. Some public buildings were occupied as part of peasant protests which were beyond the control of Solidarity. Moreover, whenever the numbers involved were mentioned, they were rarely over 20. Apparently the paper was listing only a selection of disputes, but among the half dozen chosen every day the same ones kept recurring including such minor matters as the occupation of a furniture shop in a small town by young couples wanting to buy some furniture. There were a number of strike alerts and announcements of forthcoming strikes which often did not materialise. The only serious disputes, however, were in the education sector. There is no reason to doubt the claim made at the Solidarity Presidium on 2 December 1981 that only 20,000 Solidarity members were on strike throughout the whole of Poland.

In fact, although the government directed a great deal of propaganda effort against strikes, they probably contributed little to the worsening economic situation. Working time lost through strikes in the first ten months of 1981 according to official statistics was 4.9 hours per worker.<sup>6</sup> That is lower than the figure for the same period in 1980 while paid interruptions of work had risen. The strike figure looks like an underestimate, reflecting the authorities' insistence that many workers did not respond to Solidarity strike calls, but their arguments ought to be consistent with their own figures. Moreover, time lost through strikes was undoubtedly trivial in comparison with losses due to illness and the shorter working week.

Strikes were probably not the principal cause of the authorities' fears. They were, however, the easiest propaganda target as they were resented by a large section of the population and it was credible to many people that they could be worsening the economic situation. More worrying was the possibility of the party's authority collapsing completely, and strikes were only one symptom of that.

An opinion poll, reported in the Solidarity weekly on 20 November 1981, showed just how low the party's standing had dropped. 900 Solidarity members in the Warsaw area were asked to indicate whether they trusted a list of public bodies. Solidarity came top with 95% followed by the church with 93% and the army with 68%. At the

bottom of the list was the PUWP, trusted by only 7%, although 11% of the sample were party members and 8% had been at some time in the past.

There was general agreement that trust in the government was declining, but the authorities could draw some comfort from evidence that there was a marked drop in the readiness to strike. 60% of those questioned thought that Solidarity was at least partly to blame for recent conflicts while 24% actually supported the proposal to limit the right to strike although the church hierarchy, in one of its few directly political comments, had come out firmly in opposition. There was certainly little support for opposing it with general strike action although the majority were prepared to accept protest strikes to back up negotiation with the government.

This suggested a confused situation. Solidarity members might be becoming disillusioned with strike action, but the government had every reason to be worried that the party's standing could sink even lower.

A dramatic indication of its predicament was the course of events in a factory making injection moulds in Zywiec. On 14 November the factory's Solidarity committee, representing over 95% of the workforce, passed a resolution calling for an end to the party's special position within the workplace. In particular, it was to give up its premises and to receive no more financial help in any form from the factory, party meetings were to be held only outside working hours, and there was to be no discussion of enterprise affairs with party organisations and party representatives on committees concerned with running the factory were to be removed.

Similar demands were being raised throughout Poland, but in this case the provisional workers' council agreed that the issue should be decided by a referendum and, out of 1,196 present in the factory, 1,103 valid votes were cast. 970 supported Solidarity's position, 79 opposed it and 54 voted 'don't know'. It was quite obvious that a lot of party members had supported the Solidarity position although the party's factory committee had called on its members to have nothing to do with the whole exercise.

After the results had been announced the workers' council, claiming to be acting on the will of the workforce, gave the party until 8 December to vacate its rooms. In the meantime the authorities insisted absolutely that the demand was illegal as it contravened the party's constitutionally guaranteed guiding role. The Central Committee's resolution of 28 November 1981 made opposition to the removal of

the party from workplaces its very first point. When 9 December came, talks were still proceeding in the factory, but the workers' council reaffirmed its strong stand.

Behind this conflict there were two fundamental issues. The first was the question of the party's right to a privileged position which was a key factor in holding members who wanted either a career or to belong to the organisation that had had the only real influence in the workplace. Jaruzelski insisted that this role was 'historically and morally' justified in view of the party's work in reviving and building up the Polish economy after 1944. In the early years, however, that position had been won in competition with other political forces and on the basis of workers' trust. It was therefore quite compatible with workers having a major influence within their own factories. By 1981 that was no longer true.

It would be very difficult to argue with the Solidarity committee's view that 'any interference by the party apparatus in the enterprise's activity is impermissible, especially in a self managing, independent and self financing enterprise.' That, of course, need not prevent the party from having an influence if its members could be elected into responsible positions. That, however, was unlikely to happen and this relates to the second fundamental issue.

Removing the party from its privileged position in workplaces was of very little direct relevance to the immediate economic difficulties. Nevertheless, it could command immediate support for a very different reason. As the *Trybuna Ludu* correspondent covering the story reported, workers were not deeply concerned with ideas for economic reform. Their comments included 'In my opinion it was all to show and to prove how little support the party has in the working class'. Another worker insisted 'Solidarity wants renewal and the party is putting it off'. He knew this because 'Solidarity speaks out loud while the party is devious'. Others complained generally about the shortages and the state of the economy. As far as they could see, the party had done nothing and was doing nothing.

The referendum therefore indicated how easy it would be for Solidarity to repeat the procedure throughout the country, despite Walesa's mild disapproval of the practice, or even to turn it into a straight referendum on the party's right to rule. Even though Walesa was still keen on negotiations, he might well be unable to hold back such a movement which would obviously greatly strengthen the hand of the 'radicals'. In fact, a meeting of the Solidarity committee in the Lenin shipyard on 27 November in which representatives of other

shipyards took part ended passing a resolution insisting that the government's decisions 'gave no chance of overcoming the crisis'. It called for an end to all price increases until compensation terms had been agreed and it added the fateful demand for a referendum to vote on a motion of no confidence in the government and parliament.

The Central Committee was given an account on that same day of other worrying developments since its October meeting. It was reported that there had been 198 arrests for distributing illegal publications, including those judged to be 'anti-Soviet' and many for vandalising Soviet war memorials. 19 cases had been concluded culminating in prison sentences ranging from six to 18 months. Ten new 'anti-socialist' organisations had been formed and there had been a congress in Radom on 21 and 22 November of committees for the defence of prisoners of conscience. Despite the information on arrests and imprisonments, it was claimed that their activities were quite unjustified because 'in Poland there are no prisoners of conscience'.<sup>7</sup>

Another development that frightened the party leadership was an apparent change in Kuroń's position. After being a restraining influence in earlier periods, he had become convinced that a more radical approach was necessary. He held a meeting in his flat on 22 November which was intended to inaugurate what could have become a new political party under the title 'Clubs of the Self-managing Republic – Freedom – Justice – Independence'. Among those present were some of the leading activists of KOR which had formally wound itself up at the Solidarity congress and a number of Solidarity leaders including Zbigniew Bujak, a 27 year old electrician from Ursus who was the union's Warsaw chairman. The meeting was disrupted by the police, who regarded it as an illegal gathering, and extracts from a declaration that it had allegedly prepared were reproduced in *Trybuna Ludu* on 25 November.

It argued that the creation 'of a system of control over the government of the PUWP' had not been achieved. The failure of negotiations with the government to bring about a major change was causing apathy and disunity within Solidarity. It was therefore judged to be necessary to create the nuclei of future political parties as a focus for 'social energy' that could divert people's anger away from possible 'violent public outbursts'.

Alternative strategies were strongly criticised. The suggestion that Solidarity should aim to join a coalition government was rejected as it would apparently threaten 'to split and incapacitate the union'. The idea that it could be an apolitical organisation, which had been

popular a few months before, was also rejected, but the strongest criticism of all was reserved for the powerful trend within the union which claimed adherence to general principles of national independence and Catholic views. This trend had apparently been denying a political role for the union by answering critics with generalised statements about workers' opinions, the attitudes of 'the trade union masses' and 'the spirit of the nation'. This attack must have been directed against those, such as Walesa, who accepted the church hierarchy's insistence on the need to reach agreement with the government and against those 'pragmatists' at the Solidarity congress who argued that caution was the only way to maintain the confidence of the membership.

The new approach of Kuron and his associates was partly a reflection of their inability to defeat this dominant trend within Solidarity. They had become convinced that a new initiative was essential to save the whole movement from possible disaster. It was not made clear how quickly the new party, or parties, would emerge but the expectation obviously was that Solidarity would give them protection. It would have been difficult to prevent them contesting elections at some time in the future.

Although this development followed logically from Poland's internal development, it is still surprising that Kuron should have advocated what, only shortly beforehand, he had been warning against. The declaration argued that the existing relationship with the Soviet Union, which had been accepted in August 1980, would have to be renegotiated with Poland represented by 'the authentic representatives of the nation', in a way that recognised 'the difference in strengths' but did not 'infringe the principles of sovereignty'. There was no explanation of why the USSR would be likely to accept this. Perhaps Kuron believed that its leaders would see no alternative in view of the imminent collapse of the PUWP. It was possibly more important that *he* saw no alternative to taking the chance in view of the internal situation, but it was certainly a very risky road to follow.

Apart from its international implications the creation of political parties could itself have deepened the divisions within Solidarity.

It is, however, impossible to be certain of what Kuron was intending because he was rarely able to express himself freely. A unique interview was conducted for the 10-11 October issue of the youth paper *Sztandar młodych*. This was after the new censorship law had started operating, but the editor was promptly sacked for allowing coverage to a man who was still only mentioned in the most

derogatory fashion in the official media. It did reveal, however, that, at that time, Kuron had barely changed his thinking since July. He saw the authorities in a state of collapse but he still saw nobody able to take over from them. It also made it clear that he liked to discuss, debate and toy with ideas for the distant future. Put in this context, the Clubs of the Self-managing Republic sound far less like the immediate prelude to the formation of political parties. It is hardly surprising that Kuron, after being taken away for questioning, was released without any charges being brought.

Nevertheless, the real issue behind Jaruzelski's new turn was not just the developments during November. For him they could indicate frightening possibilities for the next few months during which the economic situation was almost certain to get worse in turn leading to deeper disillusionment with the authorities.

An opinion poll conducted by Polish radio and television revealed that 80% of respondents already believed their living standards to be too low, but only 24% expected things to get even worse. They were going to be in for a big disappointment. The government could not even produce a clear plan for 1982. Instead there were three 'variants' referred to as 'fears', 'realism' and 'hopes'. They depended on coal output with the most optimistic based on a significant increase leading to a 3% rise in industrial output. The most pessimistic prognosis saw a further fall in coal output leading to another 10% drop in industrial production. These figures could be raised slightly by help from other socialist countries, but it was accepted that the West was unwilling to offer further loans as long as political and economic unrest undermined Poland's ability to raise its level of exports. An application had been made to join the IMF but that could not bring any benefits before the end of 1982.

Although the government had put on a brave face and pointed with pleasure to a slight rise in coal output in the autumn, there were serious doubts about the feasibility even of the most pessimistic plan. Foreign trade figures published in November suggested that even that could be optimistic. \$4.3 billion were needed over the next year to service outstanding debts so that, as 15% of available hard currency was needed for food imports, nothing at all would be left to pay for raw materials and components. Even the agreement with a consortium of Western banks to defer debt repayments had been placed in jeopardy. An absolute condition had been payment of all interest and 5% of the principal due in 1981. Out of \$500m needed in the last quarter, only about \$100-150m could be found.<sup>8</sup> It looked as if only a

miracle could overcome the crisis.

Contributions from miners at party Central Committee meetings left little doubt that they were deeply dissatisfied and sceptical of the feasibility of raising output. Stefan Paterek of the Victoria mine in Walbrzych, speaking on 27 November, gave a typical contribution complaining that for twenty years there had been 'a systematic lack of investment in the mine' and that a miner 'generally has to wait 15 years for housing'. As he put it 'miners want to dig coal, but they are demanding much better conditions for work, for life and for relaxation'.<sup>9</sup>

That was what the miners likely to be most loyal to the regime were offering. If all miners could work an extra day per week and if more loans could be granted, then the most optimistic plan could be surpassed. As it was, voluntary Saturday output was very variable and averaged under a third of daily output. It was under these circumstances that the party leadership effectively decided to face a showdown with Solidarity.

A few days later, on 2 December, they took their toughest action up to that date against strikers. 300 fire cadets had for eight days been staging an occupation in support of their demand for an end to military status which made their strike action illegal. Over a thousand special police units stormed the building and, although there was no serious violence, the event was seen as an indicator of the authorities' future intentions. The Solidarity Presidium met in Warsaw on the same day to consider what action should be taken in response to the police action or in the event of parliament passing a law giving the government emergency powers. Its meaning was by that time clear as unofficial reports had reached Solidarity indicating that the proposal which was to have been presented to parliament at the end of October was effectively for a state of war. All strikes and public meetings were to be banned, many work-places were to be placed under army control, military courts were to have wide powers and there were to be severe restrictions on movement around the country. In the event no clear decision was taken, but it was regarded as particularly amazing and frightening that there should be such insistence on emergency powers *after* the strike wave in industry had subsided. It seemed that 'a section of the authorities are aiming for a confrontation with the union'.<sup>10</sup> Among the responses suggested were a general strike and a referendum on how Solidarity should react to parliament passing the emergency powers law.

### 'Radicals' take the initiative

The next day a meeting was held in Radom of the union's Presidium and its regional leaderships. The venue reflected the national significance of the conflict in the university. The purpose of the meeting was not to formulate policy but to produce proposals for discussion.

It was a stormy gathering lasting about twelve hours and it became notorious because it was bugged by the authorities and some of the discussion contributions were broadcast on television in an attempt to prove that Solidarity leaders were really out to seize political power.

It would be dangerous to place too much reliance on the extracts the authorities chose to publish. Solidarity complained that they were taken out of context and that in any event they were only suggestions in a discussion. It is certainly true that the authorities emphasised the most radical contributions.

They paid great attention to Walesa's statement that 'confrontation is unavoidable and there will be a confrontation'. He went on to say that he wanted it only 'when all the groups in society are with us'. He made it clear that, since 1970, he had trusted nobody in authority and implied that he had been playing a double game. 'We have to say: we love you, we love socialism and the party and, obviously, the Soviet Union ... Don't let's deceive ourselves. From the beginning they have been thumbing their noses at us as I well knew. I didn't talk about it because I wanted to play, but today I have no way out.'

Despite this, Walesa cannot be quoted publicly expressing love for the party and it is far from clear that he always expected a confrontation, although he certainly had seen it as a very real possibility. In his contribution he also emphasised 'obviously I am for an understanding, but that needs to be discussed ... No front of national unity, no one out of seven. But I really think that it could work if it were three'. (i.e. the party, the church and Solidarity). He was very cutting about proposals for a general strike which he described as 'stupidity'. Even the extracts from his speech reproduced in *Trybuna Ludu* of 7 December 1981 leave the clear impression that he wanted at all costs to avoid a confrontation, but the government's actions were undermining his position.

At least two speakers, Palka and Bujak, advocated creating a workers' militia equipped with sticks and helmets. In Bujak's view its first task was to be 'liberating' the radio. The published extract was so

brief that it is impossible to know whether this was to be done at once or, as is more likely, after an attempt to impose martial law.

Rulewski went further than either of these. He had no interest in reaching an 'understanding'. The whole idea was in his view a 'Russian invention'. Instead, he advocated seeking the quickest possible route to parliamentary elections. That meant working for a Provisional Government which was to be non-party. A new parliament could then be formed with the PUWP holding 30% of the seats, the two other legal parties 25%, Solidarity 25% and the rest could be divided up among other groups such as the League of Polish Independence. This would apparently be acceptable internationally because Solidarity and the whole nation would become a guarantee of the Soviet Union's minimum interests in Poland. It would be allowed to keep 'military bases on Polish territory and communication lines'.

Although it is unclear whether anybody presented arguments against this, it is beyond dispute that Walesa was cornered. The new political situation, with the government about to impose martial law, might seem to justify moderation and negotiation rather than radicalism. In practice, however, it undermined Walesa's political position as it suggested that his approach had failed and would fail in the future. As he himself put it in a press conference during the Radom meeting: 'There can be no understanding, because we have nobody to reach an understanding with.' It also enraged Solidarity activists that *they* were being blamed for the country's problems. It thereby strengthened the hand of the radicals, even if a sober assessment suggested that they would lead the movement to at least as big a disaster.

The new situation also laid the basis for a realignment within the Solidarity leadership. Kuron was no longer with the 'moderates'. He argued that the time had come 'to overpower the authorities'. The key issues, in his view, were a new electoral law and the proposed state of emergency. There was no longer the same wide gulf between him and Rulewski.

Nevertheless, despite the firm rejection of the proposed basis for a new National Front, it is clear that the most radical position did not triumph. The final document produced at the meeting<sup>11</sup> expressed disillusionment at the government's apparent unwillingness to negotiate seriously, and horror at the proposed emergency powers which 'could not be introduced other than by a road of terror'. It was made clear that passing the law would be answered with a 24-hour general strike and the actual introduction of martial law would be met

with an indefinite general strike.

As an alternative to the party's proposals, the document contained a list of demands which it described as the minimum for genuine agreement. They included a new economic council with real powers, union control over food distribution and a new system for the forthcoming local elections. The most important demand, however, was an end to repressive measures against the union.

Over the following days Solidarity organisations met and the influence of the radicals was very obvious. In Warsaw Bujak proclaimed that, as the confrontation was coming, the union no longer had anything to lose. If the government really felt like taking emergency powers then he was for forming a Provisional Government. This sounds incredibly naïve and there is no report of him considering how it could be achieved if there really were a military regime. Perhaps he hoped that the army would lack the cohesion to carry out orders, but that only happens in quite exceptional circumstances and was hardly a possibility in Poland where there had been no previous signs of its discipline breaking down. Alternatively, he may have assumed that the authorities were deeply divided. Under such circumstances a tough stand could have dissuaded them yet again from trying to push the emergency powers proposal through parliament.

Other speakers went further than Bujak, leaving little doubt that they believed Solidarity to be in a position to take the initiative. There were calls for an immediate general strike or for a referendum on the issue of parliamentary elections. There were still advocates of caution who saw the union's task as working to improve the economic situation and there were some who seriously questioned whether a confrontation would not be a disaster. In the end the decision was for a day of protest on 17 December. There were voices calling for the expulsion of the small number who voted against.<sup>12</sup>

This was the typical pattern in meetings throughout Poland and set the scene for the National Commission's meeting that began in the Lenin shipyard on 11 December.<sup>13</sup> There were warnings against radical acts and there were advocates of a tripartite front. Generally, however, speakers took very radical positions. Rulewski stood by his Radom contribution. Kurowski advocated preparing a Provisional Government in secret. Palka talked of creating the new economic council even without government approval and Rozplochowski maintained that 'all agreements are a lie'. Even Walesa, although he had claimed that his Radom speech had been misinterpreted, believed

that 'the decisive moment has come'. He was unsure about how to proceed and wanted the widest consultation within the union.

The majority of representatives of the important regions advocated conducting a referendum on the question of parliamentary elections, but no resolution was passed on that until around midnight on 12 December.

### *The army takes over*

The authorities never waited to see what would happen on the day of action on Thursday 17 December, the anniversary of tragic events in 1970. They did not even wait to see the resolutions from the National Commission's meeting. Neither did they wait to see whether all PUWP deputies would support an emergency powers act in parliament. Perhaps they doubted their ability to push it through, or perhaps they feared the consequences of a lengthy public debate on the issue. Although the motion had been passed at a Central Committee meeting, it was hardly mentioned during the discussion. Resolutions from party meetings in the early part of December insisted 'that the only feasible way out of the crisis is a national understanding'. In the giant Lenin steelworks outside Krakow the call was for 'honest and constructive cooperation of all organisations'.<sup>14</sup> From the shipyards of Gdansk and Gdynia came an appeal for immediate discussions between Jaruzelski, Walesa and Glemp. Many other party organisations supported in general terms the leadership's concept of the new National Front, but none were reported calling for violent repression. There was therefore no reason to suppose that even leading party activists would stand by the proposal.

In fact, there was at last an attempt to think up a coherent alternative to the leadership's policy. It was presented by Jerzy Wiatr, the director of the party's Institute of Marxism-Leninism, reported in the 10 December issue of the Krakow party paper *Gazeta Krakowska*.<sup>14a</sup> He foresaw four possible scenarios. The first, and least likely, was a return to the pre-August 1980 situation. The second, which he thought was slightly more likely but still very improbable, was for 'the enemies of socialism' to take power. That, however, he thought would involve a civil war and lead ultimately 'to a return to a system of the most orthodox communism in the form of exercising power', because Poland's allies would never allow 'the forces of counter-revolution' to win.

The third scenario was for a military government which, once established, he thought would last for a long time. He saw it as a real

possibility, not because of the likelihood of an attempt at counter-revolution, but because of the failure of either the party or Solidarity to swing the balance in their own favour. It would be a case of 'where the two are fighting each other there the third one can profit'. That suggests that he saw the army taking a classical Bonapartist action which would lead to a major change in the power structure and down-grading of the role of the party for the foreseeable future.

That left only one alternative which Wiatr judged to be both the best and the most likely. The party would not give up power, but would give up its 'monopoly of power'. He was aware that this would face fierce opposition from people with 'dogmatically sectarian' views, but he thought it was the only way if the PUWP was to stand any chance in a contested election within the next ten or twenty years.

Wiatr made various suggestions on *how* the structure of political power could be changed, but they required concessions from both the party and Solidarity. The party would have to stop insisting that it wanted agreement only on the policies it had already decided. Solidarity would have to renounce the suggestion that agreement was possible only after an election had shown who was to govern the country. One possibility within this context was for a new parliament that would be *negotiated* rather than decided in a contested election. The party's overall majority would disappear, but it would still be a very powerful force occupying a special position thanks to Soviet trust. Moreover, and this was where his proposal was more realistic than Rulewski's general assurances to the Soviet Union, the PUWP would be seen by the USSR as a lasting guarantee of the alliance.

It could still be argued that Wiatr's idea would never have worked. The mass of the people might still not have seen the need to accept austerity and Solidarity might simply have used any power to paralyse a government still dominated by the PUWP. Ultimately it could still have ended up demanding contested elections and in principle that would have been fully justified. They are a logical and essential element in any system of ensuring that those in power are subordinated to the will of society. Moreover, it had a further powerful justification in Poland in 1981 because of the need to demand sacrifices of the population. Success would certainly be much more likely for a government that had proven its trust in an electoral contest. It was proving impossible for a discredited and unpopular regime.

The practical objections, both inside Poland and among its allies were, however, very widely recognised. There was still every possibility that an accommodation could have been found involving

major democratic changes in return for which Solidarity would have been willing to cooperate in a programme for economic recovery.

In the event Jaruzelski did not pursue this possibility. Parliament was due to meet on December 15 and 16 but its agenda contained no reference to the emergency powers proposal. Instead, he used section 2 of article 33 of the constitution which allows the Council of State – a small body that takes the powers of parliament when it is not in session – to impose martial law ‘if it is needed for the defence or security of the state’. The council was later reported to have met on 12 December and the country woke up on Sunday 13 December to find all civilian authorities sub-ordinated to a new body – the Military Council for National Salvation – made up of 20 high ranking army officers and one admiral. Its power was backed up by army units in the streets. The radio and television were very firmly under its control and newsreaders wore military uniform. All telephones had been cut off and movement around the country was tightly controlled. All trade-union and political activities were suspended, gatherings of over three people were banned – except for religious gatherings in churches – and a night curfew was imposed.

All this was sanctioned in a special decree of the Council of State which gave emergency powers to different government bodies. The government itself, for example, was empowered to censure telephone, telegraph and postal communications. The censoring organs were empowered to stop, wholly or partly, letters through the post and to cut telephone conversations if their contents ‘could threaten the interests of the security or defence of the state’: the decision of the military and civilian censors was to be final. The Ministry of Communications could forbid or limit the transport of people or things by road, rail or water. The wording was such that the controls could be relaxed – and reimposed rapidly – without requiring further legal measures.

Other provisions included the reimplementation of the six-day week and people could be compelled to work even on their free days. A long list of enterprises, covering the important sectors of the economy, were placed under military control and there was a fine of up to about one month’s pay for absence from work without good reason. Military courts were given enormous powers. Sentences were specified of up to three years for continuing the activity of a suspended organisation, up to five years for organising a strike or for ‘spreading false information if it could cause public unrest or disorder’, and up to ten years for damaging industrial equipment to further a strike or protest action, or

for using printing or other means of mass communication for the furtherance of forbidden aims. Other penalties included up to three months imprisonment for taking part in a strike or protest action or for changing one's place of abode without permission. The decree also included powers for the internment of anybody whose past behaviour could 'justify the suspicion that, if left at liberty, they would not observe the legal order or they would carry out activities threatening the interests of the security or defence of the state'. These powers were used at once and almost all of Solidarity's leading activists and advisers – all dubbed 'extremists' – were interned. A list was also published of detained discredited former party leaders, such as Gierek, and of members of 'anti-socialist' groups. Estimates of the number of internees varied enormously between a few thousand and 75,000. The official version, given by Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs Boguslaw Stachura to a committee of parliament on 7 January 1982, was that 5,906 persons had been interned. 839 had by then been released, having agreed to abstain from political activity, but arbitrary arrests continued over the following weeks. These figures are probably accurate and Red Cross and church representatives were allowed to visit a number of internment centres.

Handing over power to the military was quite unprecedented in any European socialist country. Jaruzelski insisted that it was done with the utmost reluctance. In his Christmas eve broadcast he stated: 'It was necessary to choose not between good and evil but between a greater and lesser evil. We carried out this choice. I believe the future will judge this choice justly.'

The justification, of course, was that otherwise events would have culminated in civil war. That cannot be supported by serious evidence. In the days after the military takeover one firearm was found on the premises of a Solidarity member. The reality is that Solidarity was naïvely trustful of the Polish armed forces. At the last meeting of its National Commission it passed a resolution calling for trade union rights in the police, within which there had been some pressure, but not in the army which remained the least affected of any major institution by the changes since August 1980. In so far as Solidarity activists considered a military takeover at all, they dismissed the possibility on the grounds that it could only work if backed up by unparalleled repression. There were statements from some Solidarity leaders suggesting that they had thought martial law would be only a temporary setback that would seal their ultimate victory, but in the event there was no sign of the army disintegrating. There is no reason

why it should, particularly when Solidarity's response was based on peaceful factory occupations. There were no reports of ordinary soldiers being directly involved in any violence and those Solidarity leaders who escaped internment, of whom Bujak was the best known, continued to call for *passive* resistance.

Moreover, the regime is on very weak ground when citing the final resolutions passed by the Solidarity leadership which were not even published in full in the Polish press, or the carefully selected quotes from the Radom meeting. The contributions to the National Commission meeting on 12 December were more belligerent than ever before. All the attention focused on the coming confrontation. Moreover, the National Commission's final act was to pass a resolution calling for a referendum – to be held before 15 February – on whether or not there should be free parliamentary elections. It also proposed the unilateral appointment of the new economic council.<sup>15</sup> That, of course, is very different from preparing for an armed conflict, or indeed for any sort of violence. It could be judged a tactical error to make such proposals, but that must be put in context. Those decisions followed several weeks of vitriolic propaganda against Solidarity plus talk of those unspecified emergency powers. The last resolutions were actually passed in the Lenin shipyard after the telephone and telex links had been cut and amid rumours that Gdansk had been completely isolated. They reflected the conviction that the government had ended all thoughts of agreement so that all that was left was for Solidarity to prove that it would not be intimidated. They also reflected sheer disbelief that the government could really be implementing a military clamp-down over the whole country. It was still believed that a firm stand could persuade the authorities to back down, as had happened so often before. Moreover, the resolution of the Council of State was dated 12 December, meaning that it was passed before the Solidarity leadership had adopted the resolutions that were later to be used to justify military rule.

The street demonstrations called for 17 December were, according to the well-established journalist Wieslaw Gornicki, who suddenly appeared in an army captain's uniform as the Prime Minister's special adviser at a press conference on 13 December, intended as an attempt to take power. In fact, Solidarity announced that it was to be a day of protest *against* the use of force. It is, of course, possible that there could have been disorders but, even if the most militant Solidarity activists had prepared for an immediate violent clash, for which there was no evidence, there is no reason to assume that the mass of the

Polish people would have followed them. The behaviour of the great majority of striking workers makes it appear very unlikely. In fact, the regime had more reason to fear truly massive peaceful protests that could have underlined its lack of public trust.

The question of when and how martial law was decided on is very important in this context. Jaruzelski has claimed that he was desperately hoping that an alternative could be found right up to the end. Rakowski in an interview in *The Times* on 23 February 1982 insisted that it was a very sudden decision taken in the couple of days before its implementation, although there can be no serious doubt that it had been under discussion for a long time. It had been raised in various ways at Central Committee meetings since June and there were rumours that the use of force had been advocated by a significant group in the party leadership – usually centring on Olszowski – at the end of August 1980 and again in March 1981. Of possibly greater significance was a statement by Siwak reported by the Solidarity news agency.<sup>15a</sup>

It claimed that, at a meeting with members of branch unions in Krosno on 30 September 1981, he had informed those present that a six-man Committee of National Salvation had been formed with Generals Jaruzelski and Kiszcza (Minister of the Interior) at its head and that special units of the army and police had been assigned the task of suppressing popular resistance. He had claimed that the leadership of the party and government would wait another two months before using these forces, until popular support for Solidarity had weakened.

Siwak's account may, of course, have been wrong or it may have been inaccurately reported, but martial law must have been carefully prepared in advance. Neither could it have been imposed without Soviet knowledge, as a large section of the Warsaw Pact's forces were involved, and the strong public statements from the Soviet leaders throughout the autumn suggest that they were pressing for precisely such a measure, as were a number of prominent figures in the PUWP.

Jaruzelski, with all the positions of power he had accumulated, probably had the decisive influence in the end, but it is unclear when he became convinced by the advocates of military rule. It is possible that he had already fully made up his mind when he took over as party First Secretary. The meeting with Walesa and Glemp and the talk of a new national accord could have been no more than a tactic to weaken Solidarity's support or to split its leadership. The very fact that preparations were being made is certainly evidence that he was not

confident of success along the road of agreement.

Nevertheless, no unequivocal statement can be given about the precise thinking of the party leadership during the crucial months of October and November 1981. It is perfectly possible that Jaruzelski, and most of those around him, were still genuinely trying for an agreement with Solidarity albeit on terms that made that practically impossible. The final decision to abandon all such hopes and to impose martial law may well have been taken in the light of the Radom meeting and the Solidarity gatherings over the following days, but exactly how they affected the decision cannot be as simple as claimed. They did not prove an imminent anti-government uprising but, especially in the context of the *decline* of the strike wave and the sharpening disagreements within the Solidarity leadership, they could have suggested that the road to breaking Solidarity might not be too painful.

Moreover, those meetings did underline the demise of the party's approach since September 1980 which had been based on acceptance of independent trade unions in the hope that they would not fundamentally alter the essentials of the political power structure. The PUWP, it had been hoped, could win back enough public confidence to maintain a firm monopoly of power.

By the autumn of 1981 that no longer appeared credible. As we have seen, Solidarity was as determined as ever and was elaborating policies and a programme that conflicted directly with the party leadership's aims. It was not in a position to implement them at once, but it was refusing to use its prestige to support the government's economic programme and that was, at the minimum, a powerful bargaining weapon. The PUWP could still have sought alternatives along the lines favoured by Wiatr but they were rejected by Jaruzelski, presumably because he – and others in the PUWP leadership – were determined to achieve the stabilisation of a power structure that allowed no effective share in decision making for critics of the party. As that could not be done by political means they had no option but to resort to threats, which only increased Solidarity's belligerence, and finally to the use of force.

Before any such stabilisation can be achieved, the regime will have to face a great deal of bitterness and hostility. That was clear from the start in the powerful display of working-class anger as Solidarity's members responded to their leadership's decision to stage a general strike in response to military rule. Crowds gathered in the factories unable to believe that the authorities could not be forced to give way.

They were determined not to be intimidated and confident that Solidarity could hold its organisation together but, as communications were so effectively disrupted, each town was left on his own. Nevertheless, reports made it clear that at one time or another many of the big factories were occupied. Stachura's report, not necessarily accurate, referred to 199 recorded strikes, but claimed that only 10% of the workers in those factories had taken part and that most of the country had been strike free. He did, however, admit that there had been major occupations in Gdansk, Szczecin, Katowice – where the steel works was occupied from 13 to 23 December – Wroclaw, Lublin and Warsaw. Even where there had been no strikes, army units were often stationed inside the factories. Irrespective of the original occupations of many Solidarity leaders, or of its advisers, there was no doubting its very solid base in the Polish working class.

The authorities tried all the time to present a picture of general calm, but it was 4 January before the Lenin shipyard was reopened for work. It was reported that only half the workforce turned up because the others refused to accept renunciation of Solidarity membership as a precondition for keeping their jobs. Prior to that there had been particularly tough resistance in coal mines around Katowice. In the Piast colliery, according to the account in *Trybuna Ludu* on 2-3 January 1982 1,850 men, making up a quarter of the workforce, began an underground occupation strike on 14 December saying that they would not come up until martial law had been abolished and their interned comrades released. From 22 December onwards groups of workers began coming to the surface. Only on 28 December did the bulk of the strikers give in – many of them needing medical treatment – and 12 strike leaders were immediately arrested.

That was the last strike to end, but a far more bitter conflict occurred at the nearby Wujek mine. Half its workforce was young and it had a record of militancy having been the first Silesian mine to take action in solidarity with the Baltic strikes of August 1980. *Trybuna Ludu* on 8 February 1982 reported that a few hundred miners had barricaded themselves in and refused to negotiate. As one of the older participants, a foreman who was a member of both Solidarity and the party explained, strikers had always won in the past and they were confident of victory again. They were prepared to put up stiff resistance when the security forces tried to break in and 'pacify' them with tear gas and water cannon. In the early afternoon of 17 December seven miners were shot dead and another subsequently died in hospital. It was not made clear who had given

permission for the use of firearms, but it presumably required the highest authority. The regime admitted only one other death, of a man in Gdańsk who had been involved in street clashes after the police broke up a gathering laying candles in memory of the dead of 1970.

There is no way to check these claims, but the level of violence may have been low because, despite strong talk about establishing a workers' militia, Solidarity was simply not prepared for a violent confrontation. The official account may well have understated the opposition, but as it stands it gives little support to claims about the danger of an imminent counter revolution. *Trybuna Ludu* on 2 February 1982 reported that the occupation of the Warski shipyard in Szczecin – apparently involving only 300 workers – ended peacefully when the security forces arrived at 1.00 a.m. on 15 December.

Stanisław Zawada, a union leader from the Lenin steelworks, gave a more complete picture in his account of how the strike ended in his factory a few days after the imposition of martial law. The security forces burst in on the Tuesday night and surrounded terrified groups of people – about 1,500 in that section of the works – who were ‘singing, praying and searching for some hope’. They all knew that ‘anything’ could happen and that the noise of the police sirens could be heard by their families in their homes. They could do nothing when they saw ‘units of the riot police, but units of the riot police armed, equipped with shields, truncheons, helmets with masks and visors’. It was a sight ‘that will remain in the human memory for ever’.

In that case, according to the interview Zawada gave the Polish television, nobody was beaten up.<sup>16</sup> Although he did not accept criticisms of Solidarity, he was prepared to insist that there was no point in resisting. Otherwise he would not have been interviewed. He might well have failed to tell the whole story and the interview itself could well have been edited. Elsewhere there were eyewitness accounts of savage police brutality, and strike leaders were given stiff sentences, ranging up to ten years, by the special military courts against which there was no right of appeal.

By these means it proved possible to crush Solidarity organisationally and to break the strike movement, but Western journalists visiting the Cegielski works in Poznań on 13 January found that there had been no strike but that workers were wearing Solidarity badges and proudly insisting that ‘Solidarity is alive and well here’. Visits to other factories, especially the Lenin shipyard a month later, revealed similar bitterness. A popular slogan was ‘the winter is yours, but the spring will be ours’.

In reality, however, the workers did not have the power to break military rule. Some of the provisions of martial law were relaxed bit by bit after the strikes had ended, but that did not alter the new realities of political power. Moreover, the authorities remained extremely nervous, as illustrated by the reimposition of the full rigours of martial law – including the closing of cinemas and the banning of private cars – in Gdansk after ‘incidents’ on 30 January involving clashes between the police and people distributing leaflets, and in Poznan after street demonstrations by young people over the weekend of 13-14 February.

It is very hard to foresee the regime winning widespread and genuine trust over the next few years. The bitterness left by the 1970 events was a major factor inspiring the core of activists around Walesa and an erection of a memorial to the dead outside the Gdansk shipyard was a symbolic act attracting national attention. The Poznan tragedy had not been forgotten either. Throughout the country in 1981 there were collections for a memorial to honour the dead.

Those tragedies were major milestones on the road to August 1980 but the imposition of martial law, even if the authorities' figures on deaths are accurate, will probably prove even harder to forgive and forget. It differs because the earlier acts of violence could be blamed on individual party leaders. New leaderships emerged which shared in the abhorrence at what had happened, promised never to allow a repetition and gave assurances that workers' opinions would be heeded in future.

This time the imposition of martial law – and the repression that accompanied it – had been discussed and voted on by the Central Committee at its meeting at the end of November. It is not certain that all the Central Committee members knew the exact implications of the proposal, as the details of ‘emergency powers’ were not published at the time. Some may even have thought that it was just one more step in the well-established bargaining ritual: the authorities frequently talked tough, but then found an acceptable compromise in the end.

Nevertheless, it will not be possible to dismiss it at a future date as the aberration of an autocratic leader who was out of touch with public opinion and panicked when faced with workers' protests. That was particularly clear after both parliament and the Central Committee had given their approval. It makes it very difficult to conceive of a full relaxation of repression when military rule has added so much to the legacy of bitterness.

Attempts to persuade Walesa, or other Solidarity leaders, to give approval to military rule have so far failed abysmally. An especially

embarrassing case was the union's Poznan chairman Zdzislaw Rozwalak who signed a statement immediately after the imposition of martial law deplored Solidarity's alleged conversion into an opposition political party. A month later he announced to Western journalists that he had done this under the threat of internment and that his friends had subsequently convinced him to stand by his beliefs and he dissociated himself from his own statement.

As consolidation could not be based on genuine public approval, it had to centre around rigid control from the top. Journalists were carefully screened for any sign of opposition to military rule and state employees, following a circular of 17 December, were forced to sign loyalty pledges and renounce Solidarity membership. The alternative was to face the forced labour decreed for all unemployed people under martial law.

By 26 January the authorities felt secure enough to hold a meeting of parliament which was to confirm the legality of the specific provisions of martial law. The result was a foregone conclusion. The meeting would never have been allowed otherwise. There were, however, strongly critical speeches from two MPs, one of whom was speaking on behalf of the small Catholic Social Union. They both abstained in the vote, along with three others, while the independent MP Romuald Bukowski actually voted against, although he said nothing in the discussion. If anyone else had doubts about martial law they must have decided that it was pointless to voice them. In fact, the loyalty of Pax had been assured by a change of leadership shortly beforehand.

The overwhelming vote in parliament confirmed the position of the Catholic church, its prestige already rising as the regime's credibility collapsed, as the only significant legally acceptable critic of martial law. Glemp had, in fact, equivocated at first. His sermon on Sunday 13 December was repeatedly broadcast over Warsaw radio because it implied opposition to strikes. 'Do not start a fight of Pole against Pole,' he warned, arguing that martial law was 'the new reality' and that any protest was bound to fail. He toughened up his approach after active resistance had ended. A letter to Jaruzelski on 28 December protested that loyalty oaths would leave the administration dependent on 'broken, weak and frightened people'. Shortly afterwards he was publicly and powerfully condemning the shooting of workers and internment and began calling for the restoration of Solidarity. That, however, is not likely to persuade the authorities to return to the road of agreements and compromises. It is probably

largely because of the church's long record of reluctance to support serious opposition that it was not affected by the ban on all meetings of three or more people, which would, of course, have been extremely difficult to impose.

There clearly were differences within the church with some prominent figures, and the Pope as well, seeming to take a firmer line in support of Solidarity. As its statements became stronger, however, so rumours began to spread that there might be widespread arrests of church leaders and priests. Glemp's response was to warn against direct involvement in opposition activities. Instead, the church was to concentrate on a humanitarian role by, for example, helping internees and their families.

Party meetings, however, were suspended while basic organisations were rapidly purged of open opponents of martial law. Probably an extreme example was the case of Torun University which had had 502 members.<sup>17</sup> On 7 January 1981 the Regional Executive dissolved the whole organisation thereby relieving all members of their rights and obligations. It was accused of operating in contravention of the line of the Ninth Congress, although that accusation could better be levelled against the supporters of martial law, and of following 'a line of capitulation to the enemies of socialism and the party'. That meant, among other alleged mistakes, support for the strike over the Bydgoszcz events.

350 members applied to remain in the party and, following a screening, 296 were accepted. The organisation was reconstituted on 21 January.

During this period there were reports of Regional Committee meetings and the Political Bureau also met, although very little was revealed about what it actually discussed or decided. Finally, on 24 and 25 February the authorities were ready for the Central Committee meeting that had been promised since early January.<sup>18</sup>

There was no open criticism of martial law and the meeting ended with Barcikowski proposing the expulsion from the Central Committee of two of its members. Marian Arendt, the party secretary in a Torun factory, was accused of undermining Central Committee resolutions on an extra-party platform, of using the horizontal structures in his disruptive activities and of 'exhibiting an inappropriate attitude' to the introduction of martial law. Jan Malanowski, a lecturer at Warsaw university, was accused of questioning the leading role of the party and of undermining alliances. He was also condemned for failing to resign from Solidarity after the

October Central Committee meeting had criticised the union in very strong terms.

Barcikowski's resolution was accepted by an open vote. There was no report of opposition to it, or to the main resolution. It therefore appears likely that neither Arendt nor Malanowski were present to answer the criticisms.

The discussion itself was dominated by a lengthy opening address from Jaruzelski which still justified martial law as the only option left following the failure of all other attempts to overcome the political and economic crisis and, in particular, after the 'aggressive monologue' from Radom and Gdansk.

He did not pretend that military rule alone could solve the country's deeper problems. The key to future policy for him was the insistence that 'martial law does not mean putting reforms into cold storage ... There can be no retreat from the line of socialist renewal'. The resolutions decided at the Ninth Congress were still said to be valid.

He may well have meant this seriously as he repeated the point in every major speech. Moreover, for some fields it was at least partly true. The economic reform was still to go ahead, although the crucially important provisions for self management and greater democracy could hardly apply in the new situation, and Jaruzelski made it clear that there would be no reversal in agricultural policy. He stressed 'the inviolability of family farming and the equal treatment of all sectors of agriculture', and this was forcefully reiterated in policy statements from the PUWP and the United Peasant Party suggesting that the new military regime could be making a real effort to win support among private farmers.

These economic measures, however, are unlikely to lead to the significant improvement in the situation over the next two or three years that Jaruzelski predicted. The problem of an unrepayable debt has not yet led to Poland being declared in default. Western banks have continued to show some generosity accepting delays in the repayment of the amount due for December 1981 as part of the rescheduling agreement. Any one out of 460 could technically have demanded immediate payment, but that would have had little point as Poland has so few impoundable assets.

A number of Western governments, however, have been made far less cooperative by the imposition of military rule. The USA in particular has taken the opportunity to impose economic sanctions and to refuse a number of short-term trade credits. Jaruzelski admitted that this was causing greater difficulties for the hard pressed

pharmaceutical industry. Refusal of a loan for maize imports was also claimed to signal the destruction of two thirds of the poultry industry with the prospect of the elimination of 13,000 jobs and a further reduction of over 10% in meat supplies for the population. For much of the economy, however, sanctions could do little further harm as imports from the West had already been cut to a minimum.

Some of Poland's problems might be helped by a closer integration with other socialist countries and Jaruzelski was keen to tell the Central Committee of the hopes surrounding a visit by Soviet economic experts who were assessing how closer cooperation could make better use of Poland's industrial resources. It was, however, implicitly recognised that the Polish economy needs contacts with the West as the government reaffirmed its application to join the IMF.

The authorities have also lost goodwill from the mass of the workers. Solidarity leaders who have escaped internment have been calling for passive resistance and non-cooperation which certainly cannot have helped the economic situation, although those are rarely effective and sustainable weapons and industrial disruption has been due predominantly to the lack of foreign currency.

Jaruzelski could point to improvements in a few sectors — most significantly in coal mining where reintroduction of Saturday working brought production in January 1982 almost back to the 1980 level — but the pattern generally was of continuing decline with many sectors running at 50-60% capacity.

As the economic crisis deepens the military regime will become less popular. Nevertheless it will probably feel obliged to impose even tougher austerity measures in the hope of reassuring creditors that, one day, it may be able to repay something. Jerzy Urban made that clear at a press conference on 10 January 1982 with the words, 'The authorities have sufficient means to survive, but society will have to go short if necessary.' There is certainly no reason to suppose that unpopularity and economic hardships will force Jaruzelski to restore the democratic rights that existed before 13 December and to return to a road that he believes has already failed. Moreover, as was argued earlier in this chapter, it was partly the awareness that the economic crisis would deepen that strengthened the belief that an authoritarian solution was the only possibility.

Nevertheless, the authorities actually felt unable to impose the price increases they wanted. That must raise serious doubts about their ability both to force through really tough austerity measures and to provide the preconditions for an economic reform placing greater

reliance on the market mechanism.

Proposals were publicised during January and – in contrast to 1970 and 1976 – there was a period of ‘discussion’ and a phone number was made public for those wanting to contact the minister responsible. A genuine public debate was obviously impossible, but there must have been an enormous flood of protests. It was decided that the prices for heat and energy were to rise by an average of 171% – substantially less than initially proposed and not enough to eliminate the need for a state subsidy, while prices of food were still to rise by an average of 241%. However, every employee was to receive full compensation for a quantity of food equal to the current rations, except for those earning over 13,000 zlotys per month – about twice the average – who were to receive nothing.

That meant, as was admitted at the time, that even the massive price increases the government insisted on were inadequate to restore market equilibrium.

Apart from these attempts to start the economic reform, which does not threaten the authorities’ monopoly of power, ‘renewal’ could hardly continue. Many speakers at the Central Committee meeting took up the theme of publicising the resolutions of the Ninth Congress, but none was reported quoting from them, or referring to the main resolution’s insistence that the tragic events in Poznan in 1956 and on the Baltic in 1970 had been major contributory factors to the party’s lack of trust. Neither was there a serious attempt to show how martial law and the suppression of Solidarity could be compatible with the resolution’s insistence on extending socialist democracy within which independent and self-governing trade unions were to have had a specially important role.

In fact, Jaruzelski’s analysis of the roots of the crisis amounted to a major retreat from the view of the Ninth Congress. He referred to economic errors in the 1970s as the consequence of mistakes by particular individuals. He was no longer interested in deeper ‘deformations’ that had persisted for decades.

Jaruzelski’s claim to be continuing with the line of ‘socialist renewal’ is, in fact, incredible. It is impossible to institute democratic reform on the basis of mass repression. This is particularly true when the most important reform of all, the acceptance of genuinely independent trade unions, had been rescinded. There was a lot of talk about the exact form unions should take, and the government published its own statement on how the discussion should be conducted on 22 February. It insisted that ‘all substantive guarantees’

would be maintained to ensure that unions would be independent and self-governing, but the character of the 'discussion' itself made that promise meaningless. At the time *all* union activities were suspended – something quite unknown in any socialist country ever before – and party organisations were asked to take on their welfare functions. The most important point had in fact been made by Captain Wieslaw Gornicki when attending a meeting of the World Peace Council in Copenhagen. He told a press conference there on 6 January that Walesa might once again be permitted to become a trade union leader but that he was too uneducated to be allowed to play a role in politics. It seems that the form of the unions was to be worked out by the authorities with the workers' representatives interned while leading personnel were to require prior approval from army officers. It is impossible to conceive of any genuine independence under such circumstances.

Nevertheless, clear differences did emerge at the Central Committee meeting and Jaruzelski still appeared to stand somewhere around the middle of the spectrum of views. There was certainly no suggestion that the road of dialogue and agreement could be tried again but there were some who really did seem to see repression as the answer to all Poland's problems.

An example was Jerzy Urbanski of the party's Central Control Commission which had a major responsibility for the screening. He put the blame for the crisis not on past economic mistakes or methods of leadership but on the softness of the party leaders. They had, he claimed, fallen victim to a range of incorrect views. In particular, they had assumed that 'all social conflicts ... could be solved by narrowly defined political methods' which had, he claimed, led 'in practice to a desertion of the fundamentals of socialism'. The need was therefore for firm party unity with no more scope for 'clubs, seminars and other groupings outside the statutes'.

He did not refer to the problem of public confidence or to the line of the July party congress. All his emphasis was on the need to beware of subversion and to ensure the purity of the party's ranks. Many other speakers took this up, calling for a more extensive purge to reach into higher ranks of the apparatus, but that was often combined with references to the need to win some public respect.

The difficulties were made clear by Ryszard Kucharski of the Warsaw car factory who said that he was particularly disturbed to hear some contributors suggesting 'that today we have martial law and everything is now going well'. He reported that not one single

complete Polonez had left his factory since the start of the year. Meanwhile, several thousand people had paid in advance and were waiting for a car and there were fears among the workforce about whether they would have work to do in the future.

Kucharski was adamant that political struggle still continued and he reported that the party had not been able 'to break down the wall of indifference' and convince the workforce that its intentions were 'pure, honest and just'. He could, however, provide no solution as he too accepted that the imposition of martial law had been necessary.

Although there were differences at the Central Committee meeting, the discussion was noticeably less open than at earlier meetings. Military rule and the rapid purge of the party's ranks had ensured much greater conformity. The ruling group within the PUWP was in full control and the promotion of Interior Minister and military council member Czeslaw Kiszcak to the Political Bureau confirmed the growing influence of the army within the party's top bodies.

There is no longer talk of an early end to martial law, but even when that is rescinded it need not change the reality of who holds power. Once having taken power and suppressed or subordinated bodies that could challenge their position, military men are notoriously hard to dislodge. Even if they have not usurped civilian control over the details of social and economic policy, they are likely to maintain a broad overall authority with particularly tight control over law and order and security for a very long time to come. Signs of public hostility will persist but the very fact that the regime lacks widespread trust can serve as justification for continuing with rigid authoritarianism.

Effective power is likely to remain in the hands of a small ruling group which is united in distrust and fear of its own people but which can never solve the fundamental problems that have given rise to Poland's repeated crises. The road to democratisation has been blocked for the foreseeable future and that is a serious blow to socialism both in Poland and throughout the world. The reopening of that road at a later date would be helped by a relaxation of cold war tensions which have frequently been used as a pretext for repressive policies. Ultimately it depends very much on developments throughout Eastern Europe and especially in the Soviet Union as well as on the determination of the Polish people.

## NOTES

1. All quotes from this Central Committee meeting are taken from *Trybuna Ludu*, 17-18 and 19 October 1981.
2. *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 13 November 1981.
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8. For details see *The Economist* 19 December 1981 and 20 March 1982.
9. *Trybuna Ludu*, 30 November 1981.
10. *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 11 December 1981.
11. *ibid.*
12. *Trybuna Ludu*, 7 December 1981.
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- 14a. Quoted in *Le Monde*, 14 December 1981 and *Polityka*, 20 February 1982.
15. *Le Monde*, 16 December 1981.
- 15a. Quoted in *Uncensored Poland Newsbulletin*, 10 January 1982, published by Information Centre for Polish Affairs (U.K.).
16. Extracts from the transcript were reproduced in *Polityka*, 20 February 1982.
17. *Polityka*, 20 February 1981.
18. All quotes from the meeting are from *Trybuna Ludu*, 25, 26, 27-28 February 1982.

# Index

- agricultural policy, 37-8, 52-3, 59, 101-3, 135, 142, 245; collectivisation, 11, 24, 26-7, 37-8  
anti-Sovietism, 35, 50, 86, 212, 216, 226  
Arendt, M., 244-5
- Babiuch, E., 112, 118  
Banicki, E., 214  
Barcikowski, K., 117, 161, 166, 169, 170, 244-5  
Beck, Col., 6  
Bierut, B., 40  
Bozyk, P., 104  
Bratkowski, S., 131, 206  
Brezhnev, L., 164, 212  
Brus, W., 101  
Brzezinski, Z., 99  
Bugaj, R., 151-2, 195, 207-9, 220  
Bujak, Z., 226, 230, 232, 237  
Bukowski, J., 108  
Bukowski, R., 243  
Bulganin, N.A., 42  
Bydgoszcz, 136-8, 146, 159-60, 166, 180, 213, 244
- Carter, J., 99  
Catholic church, 9, 21, 32-3, 46, 49, 86, 95-6, 117, 145, 217, 227; and martial law, 243-4; and Solidarity, 176-8  
Cegielski works, Poznan, 41-2, 241  
Celinski, A., 192  
censorship, 30-1, 120, 146-8, 174, 203-4, 212, 235  
Churchill, W., 12, 16  
coal mining, 44, 64, 155-6, 229, 246  
Cominform (Informbureau) 26 8, 30, 40  
Comintern, 5, 8, 15, 24, 26  
commercial shops, 113  
Communist Party of Poland, 3-7, 40  
Confederation of Independent Poland, 95, 112, 178, 201, 209, 231  
constitution (1976), 85-6
- CPSU Twentieth Congress, 39-41, 49  
Curzon line, 4, 15  
Cyrankiewicz, J., 42, 48  
Czechoslovak events, 1968, 84-5, 93, 163, 167
- Dabrowa workers' council, 3-4  
Democratic Party, 202  
DiP (Experience and Future), 86, 93-5, 103, 105, 113, 131, 141, 217  
Djilas, M., 100  
Dubcek, A., 163-4
- economic crisis (1980-2), 109, 123-9, 228-9, 245-6  
economic reform, 44-5, 52-8, 103, 112, 121, 123; party's proposals, 149-53; see also self management  
economic stabilisation programme, 154-6, 207-12  
Eden, A., 13  
Ejsmont, P., 206  
emergency powers, 215, 218, 221, 229, 231-2
- Fiat, 108  
Fiszbach, T., 169  
Free Trade Unions, Committee for, 114, 176  
Front of National Understanding, 214, 216-7, 233  
Front of National Unity, 171
- Gabrys, G., 158  
Gaspar, S., 199  
Gdansk; agreement, 120-2, 132, 144, 147, 150, 173-4; strikes, 79-81, 114-22  
Geremek, B., 178  
Gierek, E., 60, 68, 79, 80-4, 86-7, 89-91, 95-6, 98, 106, 109, 111-2, 114, 116-8, 120, 128, 141-3, 145, 148, 236

- Glemp, J., 218, 220, 233, 238, 243-4  
 Glowczyk, J., 123  
 Gomulka, W., 18-9, 22-3, 25-8, 30, 40,  
   43-4, 46, 48-62, 68-9, 79, 80, 82-3,  
   87-8, 96, 98, 106, 142, 149, 207  
 Gornicki, W., 237, 248  
 Gottwald, K., 22  
 Grabski, T., 158-60, 163, 165-6, 169,  
   215  
 Grzyb, Z., 134, 144, 146, 170, 214  
 Gwiazda, A., 180-1, 203-4  
  
 Hebda, M., 221-2  
 Hitler, A., 6-7  
 Home Army, 15-16, 43  
 horizontal structures, 153, 161, 165,  
   193, 215, 244  
 hospitals, 90, 133  
 housing, 60, 67, 89-90  
 Hungarian economy, 56-7, 101, 103,  
   150-3  
 Hutchinson, 198  
  
 IMF (International Monetary Fund),  
   208, 228, 246  
 Independent Union of Students, 183, 222  
  
 Jagielski, M., 114, 118  
 Japanese economy, 103, 107, 150  
 Jaroszewicz, P., 108, 112, 143  
 Jaruzelski, W., 135-6, 158-9, 160, 163,  
   165, 170, 172, 216-20, 225, 228,  
   233, 235-6, 238-9, 243, 245-7  
 Jastrzebie, 120, 122-4  
 Jews, 1, 9-12, 51, 218  
 Jurczyk, M., 203-4, 208, 218  
  
 Kalecki, M., 39, 59, 61, 71-2, 103  
 Kakol, K., 51, 84  
 Kania, S., 82, 141-7, 157-8, 160, 162-74,  
   192, 206, 212-6, 219  
 Katowice Forum, 164, 166  
 Katowice steel works, 105, 145, 240  
 Katyn, 12, 85, 149, 177, 183, 212  
 Khrushchev, N.S., 30, 40, 44-5  
 Kiszcak, C., 238, 249  
 KOR (KSS), 92-3, 95, 114, 116, 120,  
   176, 178-9, 226  
 Kucharski, R., 210, 248-9  
 Kulaj, J., 198  
 Kuron, J., 50, 93, 157-8, 177-9, 193-4,  
   196, 202, 205-6, 217, 226-8, 231  
 Kurowski, S., 207-8, 232  
 land reform, 11, 23  
 Lenin, V.I., 4-6, 27-8, 33-4, 173  
 Lenin shipyard, Gdansk, 79, 114, 182,  
   225, 232, 237, 240-1  
 Lenin steelworks, Krakow, 75, 233, 241  
 licences, 107-9  
 Lis, Bogdan, 204, 206, 214  
 Lodz; agreement 166, 183; strikes, 75,  
   82, 183  
 Lopatka, A., 25  
 LOT, 191  
 Lublin; government, 17, 23; strike, 114,  
   117  
 Luxemburg, R., 2, 4  
  
 Malanowski, J., 244-5  
 Manuilsky, D., 8  
 Marshall Plan, 26  
 martial law, 218, 235-6  
 Marx, K., 33  
 Massey-Ferguson-Perkins, 108  
 Matthews, M., 68  
 Mazowiecki, T., 183  
 meat, 58-9, 89, 111-3, 125, 128, 214  
 media, 145-8, 198, 203  
 Mikolajczyk, S., 16-7, 19, 24-5  
 Military Council of National Salvation,  
   235  
 Milosz, C., 148  
 Minc, H., 36  
 Moczar, M., 52, 82-3, 95  
 Moculski, L., 95, 178  
 Modzelewski, K., 50, 206  
 Molotov, V.V., 11  
 Morawski, W., 73  
 Munich, 6  
 Mussolini, B., 7  
  
 Najdowski, Z., 166  
 Narozniak, J., 131  
 'Network', 191, 193  
 NKVD, 17-9, 30

- nomenklatura*, 29, 34, 43, 48, 76, 85, 120, 130, 134, 173, 195, 200, 202, 209  
Nuremberg, 14  
Ochab, E., 41  
Oder-Neisse line, 21, 25  
Olszowski, S., 111, 150, 160, 170, 206, 215-6, 238  
opinion polls, 138, 145, 184, 195-6, 200, 223-4, 228  
over-investment, 39, 54, 57, 60, 89, 103  
Palka, G., 208, 220, 230, 232  
parliament, 28, 45, 84-6, 108, 151-2, 154-5, 201, 207, 218  
Paterek, S., 229  
Pax, 32, 86, 217, 243  
Peasant Party, 18, 24  
Phillips, M., 22-3  
Piast colliery, 240  
Pilsudski, J., 2-8, 11, 21, 96, 148  
Pinkowski, J., 118, 135  
Plock petrochemical works, 160, 168-9  
*Po prostu*, 40, 48  
Poland's debt, 44, 87-8, 97, 101, 105-6, 124, 126, 228, 245  
Polish army, 7-10, 12-16, 18, 131, 159, 216-7, 235  
Polish Labour Party, 193  
Polish nationalism, 1-2, 28, 96, 149  
political prisoners, 121, 177-8, 226  
Polonez, 108, 146, 248  
Pope John Paul II, 95, 244  
Poznan events (1956), 40-3, 45, 142, 173, 242  
press strike, 198  
price increases (1953), 39; (1970), 60, 79; (1976), 91; (1980-2), 112-3, 125, 195, 209-11, 246-7  
privilege, 68, 101, 174  
PUWP (Polish United Workers' Party); creation, 28; Eighth Congress, 111-2; leading (guiding) role, 45, 48, 84-6, 120, 130, 147, 171-3, 188, 199, 205, 224-5; Ninth Congress, 169-75, 215, 244-5, 247; special composition, 29, 75-6; Third Congress, 49; workplace organisation, 70, 75-6, 244-5  
PWP (Polish Workers' Party), 15, 17-9, 22-7  
Radom; meeting, 230-1, 237, 239, 245; Solidarity, 132-4, 182, 189, 209; strikes, 90-1; university, 183, 221-2  
Radoskor, 134, 144  
Rakowski, M., 83, 93, 158-9, 166-7, 169-72, 195, 197-8, 201, 203, 215, 238  
Reagan, R., 122, 199, 208  
Renault, 108  
revisionism, 49, 51-2, 71, 163-4, 172  
Ribbentrop, J., 11  
Rokossovsky, K.K., 17, 28  
Roosevelt, F.D., 16  
Rozpłochowski, A., 205, 232  
Rozwałak, Z., 243  
Rulewski, J., 136, 154, 178, 180, 182, 194, 199, 202-4, 214, 230, 232, 234  
'Rural Solidarity', 135, 137-8, 166-7, 182, 198, 217  
Russian revolution (1905), 2, 9; (1917), 3, 27  
*Sanacja*, 7, 11, 21  
self management, 69-76, 97, 134; conference of 72-4; party's proposals, 152-4; Solidarity and 191-2, 194-6, 200-1, 204  
Self Managing Republic, 206-7, 213, 219  
Sienkiewicz, J., 181  
Sikorski, W., 5, 11, 13, 17, 148-9  
Siwak, A., 170, 212, 238  
Sobolev, A.I., 28  
'social contract', 123, 153, 177  
Social Democrats, 2-3  
Socialist Party, 2-3, 7, 18, 23-4, 27  
socialist renewal, 141-6  
Solidarity; congress, 197-210, 213; differences within, 176-82; draft programme, 174, 185-9; economic policies 151-2, 154, 191-6, 200, 207-11, 219-20; 'extremists', 179-82; international contacts, 187-8, 199; organisation, 181-2, 200; political role, 182, 184-5; programme

- resolution, 204-11; social origins, 197, 204; weekly paper, 183
- Soviet army in Poland, 4-6, 17-8, 44-5
- Soviet invasion fears, 137, 163-4, 178-9, 193, 203
- Stalin, J.V., 8, 12, 16-7, 22, 26-7, 29, 30, 33-4, 38-40, 44, 49, 54, 70, 97, 99
- Stachura, B., 236, 240
- Stepien, Z., 215
- strike statistics, 223
- Szczecin; agreement, 120, 132; strikes, 81-2, 116-7, 203
- Szydlak, J., 116, 118
- Technological backwardness, 55, 57-9, 106-7
- Tito, J.B., 26
- Thatcher, M., 199
- Thorez, M., 22
- Torun university, 244
- totalitarianism, 99-100
- Trzeciakowski, W., 208, 220
- unemployment, 7, 38, 88, 125, 187
- United Peasant Party, 136, 202, 245
- university reforms, 183; strikes, 221-2
- Urban, J., 187-8, 195-6, 198, 246
- Urbanski, J., 248
- Ursus factory, Warsaw, 91, 108-9, 113, 131, 145, 226
- Walentynowicz, A., 114-5
- Walesa, L., 115, 130, 135, 150, 174, 176, 178-82, 197-8, 200, 202-4, 206, 211, 217-20, 225, 227, 230-3, 238, 242, 248
- Warsaw car factory (FSO), 43, 153, 210, 248
- Warsaw Pact, 178, 203, 206, 238
- Warsaw uprising, 16
- Warski shipyard, Szczecin, 241
- Werblan, A., 51-2, 161
- Wesolowski, W., 63-5, 68
- Wiatr, J., 233-4, 239
- women, 65-7, 73, 194
- workers' councils, 3, 23, 43, 70-5, 152, 154, 191
- World Federation of Trade Unions, 187
- Wrobel, A., 160
- Wujek colliery, 240
- Wyszynski, S., 31, 46, 95, 111, 117, 218
- Yugoslav economy, 55-6, 71, 194
- Zawada, S., 241
- Zhukov, G.K., 42
- Zionism, 51, 83
- Znak, 86

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